

UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA  
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM STUDIES

TOPIC:

**THE LIMITATIONS OF THE MARXIST IDEALS IN THE PLAYS OF  
FEMI OSOFISAN: A STUDY OF *ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS*,  
*MOROUNTODUN*, AND *WHO'S AFRAID OF SOLARIN?***

By

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TITLE PAGE

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## **CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that Obasi, Nelson Torti a postgraduate student of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka with Registration Number PG/MA/Ph.D/03/34618 has satisfactorily completed the requirement for the course work and project for the award of a Master of Arts (MA) degree in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

This project is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree of this or any other University.

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## APPROVAL PAGE

The Thesis of Obasi, Nelson Torti with Registration Number PG/MA/03/34618 is hereby approved.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my spouse, Mrs. Ebere Ola Obasi, and to my children,  
Chisom and Chizaram Obasi for their moral and spiritual concerns.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work cannot be complete without appreciating the contributions of some people. First, I thank the Almighty God for His infinite mercies and sustenance through these trying moments.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0

#### 1.1 Background of the Study:

This work examines Femi Osofisan's *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* to interrogate the limits and otherwise of the author as a Marxist as claimed by many of his critics. The man, Femi Osofisan, no doubt, is a pillar in the sphere of dramaturgy not only in Nigeria but also outside the shores of Nigeria. He is many things in one. Osofisan is a consummate man of the theatre, a skilled playwright, a poet, an actor, a director, and an artist of great repute, while the province of his plays is neck-deep in the Yoruba culture. On the other hand, the major themes in his plays are corruption, injustice, oppression, treachery, self-reliance and perseverance. Others are determination, feminism, compassion, collaboration, blackism, and revolution, among others.

Like other theatre scholars, past and present, who have the singular task of making their societies conducive for human habitation, Osofisan focuses his energies on themes such as injustice and oppression, self-reliance, corruption, treachery, determination, collaboration, revolution, compassion, among others in their works. Time was when writers or poets were seen as mere entertainers or people not fit to leave in an ideal republic but be banished for simple reason that their works were seen as corrupting the minds of the people (*The Republic*, Book 3, 10). Many people feel that literature is nothing but a mere witnessing of a kind.

Skeptics, according to Maxwell A. E. Okoli, “have never accorded it, the force and vision capable of stirring up a revolution” (71). They thought of the writer as not more important in society as an ordinary dart player.

However, history has changed all these, for the writer has metamorphosed into a visionary, a soldier, an agent of social change, using his writing as a weapon. Great writers work for progress by transforming their societies and its conditions, arousing men from their apathy and servile sentence, delivering them from the shackles of enslaving traditions, religions, dogmatism and political dictatorship. They often times launches into militant literature, raising their ideals like a banner, like a light for the people, and pulls off a revolutionary change that leaves society, wiser and more progressive (Literature and Social Change, 72). Literature on the other hand, which is the product of the writer’s thought processes is an excellent tool of propagating ideas and sensitizing men to dream and aspire in their society. It serves both social and political causes that could be used to hatch and realize revolutions. It has the power to destroy in order to reconstruct. Literature thus could be said to be a catalyst for social reform as well as a missile against all forms of abuse. These tendencies of the writer and that of literature are what Marxist ideology strongly seeks to espouse. For as Ken Smith submits, “any person seeking to change the world in a socialist direction, the ideas of Marxism are a vital, even indispensable tool and weapon to assist the working class in its struggle to change society” (1).

Perhaps there is no doubt that, Femi Osofisan could be classified as a Marxist writer who demands social change in favour of the oppressed and down trodden masses in the society as the theme of his plays expresses. But this Marxist ideology is limited to some degree, contrary to the views of his numerous readers and critics who see him as a consummate Marxist. It is on this note, and indeed, this popular believe that this work tends to differ and to interrogate these claims as contentious. The reason being that difference, departure and even superiority are often hastily read into his works. As a dramatist, what he theorizes are sometimes not put to practice. Moreover, as Saint Gbilekaa argues, “Osofisan’s theatre is eminently practical, and the practicality of his theatre has made it to subvert both myth and history, using them as pegs to hang his ideological and political idiosyncrasy” (75).

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem:**

The problem which necessitated this study is the popular perception and lumping together virtually most of Femi Osofisan’s plays as Marxist model by many scholars. This study argues and debunks the prevailing assumptions that his plays are pure example of Marxist-oriented dramaturgy. Some of his texts lack Marxist spirit to a significant degree, but these apologists make these claims based on preconceived notions and lack of commitment to treat individual plays as a unique literary work of art.

Muyiwa P. Awodiya, one of these supporters, was emphatic that Femi Osofisan advocates social change in his dramatic and non-dramatic writings (38).

In the same vein, D. S. Izevbaye observes that, “Osofisan has very strong sympathy for Marxist-ideas about politics and society and believes that a country like Nigeria needs revolutionary stance on the part of writers” (39). While Biodun Jeyifo asserts that, “Osofisan is unquestionably, a man of the left, a radical writer and a critic who has embraced a class approach to the production and reception of literature in our society” (38).

On the other hand, Niyi Osundare debunked the claims about Osofisan’s Marxist ideal and says that, “what one can talk about in Osofisan’s plays are tendencies, not hard-and-fast or a clear-cut ideological stance... Tendencies that, range from liberal through the radical to the revolutionary” (38). While Dapo Adelugba rather observes that, “although Osofisan espouses Marxian doctrines, I do not think it would be adequate to describe his works as Marxist as many critics do, and are unable to wholly justify that description.... I would rather say that his work is proto-Marxian (Dapo Adelugba, 30). As a springboard for this study, efforts will be made to critically examine some play texts by Femi Osofisan to buttress the arguments advanced in this work.

### **1.3 Rational for Study:**

The objective of this study is to critically examine the plays of Femi Osofisan. The plays that will be examined here are *Once upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who’s Afraid of Solarin?* The investigation will enable the

researcher to determine if Osofisan's plays are purely Marxian in content or otherwise

### **Research Questions:**

. The following research questions will be used as a springboard for the thesis: Does Femi Osofisan's plays fall into the Marxist model? If so, is he a consummate Marxist as some critics tend to believe? To what degree do his plays reflect Marxist spirit? The above questions are what this research work tends to examine.

### **1.4 Significance of Study:**

Like other fields of study, dramatic theory and criticism is not meant to be static, neither should the Aristotelian model of dramatic theory be universal and internal. For as the European theatre itself demonstrates, "the apparatus of the theatre can be put together in different ways, and new axioms lead to new universes in the theatre as well as geometry" (Onuora Ossie Enekwe, 12).

Moreover, the field of literary theory is replete with principles and ideas that appear to oppose one another in exclusive dogmatism. To cap it up, Jameson submits that, "interpretation is not an isolated act but takes place in a Homeric battlefield on which a host of interpretive options are openly or implicitly in conflict. It is based on the above axioms that this study subjects the plays of Osofisan to critical examination to determine the degree of Marxist spirit inherent in them. This study, therefore, will be significant to theatre scholarship, especially

researchers and students interested in dramatic criticisms. The study will also contribute to the prevailing criticisms in the field of literary studies, including the works of Femi Osofisan.

### **1.5 Scope of Study:**

An examination of the nature of problem shows that problems stem from the juxtaposition of factors which result in a perplexing state of mind, an undesirable consequence or a conflict which obscure the appropriate course of action. A theoretical framework which is used as the basis for this study, therefore, helps one's research to determine what things to measure and what statistical relationship will be looked for. To understand this better, it is expedient to understand, according to Bernard Beckerman that, "problems do not exist in nature but in the minds of people; that the theoretical creation becomes imperative and a measure against which new works must be placed and old ones reconsidered" (1). To Marx Webber, "problems cannot be articulated except within a conceptual system and no inquirer can investigate a problem from all perspectives simultaneously" (1). Furthermore, because no literary theory can account for all the various factors included in everyone's conceptual framework, and because as readers we all have different literary experiences, there can exist no meta-theory. That is, no one over-arching literary theory that encompasses all possible interpretations of text suggested by its readers. And too, there can be no one correct literary theory, for in and of itself, each literary theory asks valid

questions of and about a text, and no one theory is capable of exhausting all legitimate questions to be asked about any text (Charles E. Bressler, 8).

The scope, therefore, of this study is limited to our enquiry of three plays of Femi Osofisan *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* The essence is to subject these plays to critical analysis to debunk the prevailing assumption by critics that his plays are pure examples of Marxist dramaturgy.

#### **1.6 Theoretical Framework:**

The field of literary theory as already stated is replete with principles and ideas that appear to oppose one another in exclusive dogmatism. For this reason, James posits that, “interpretation is not an isolated act but takes place in a Homeric battlefield on which a host of interpretive options are openly or implicitly in conflict” (13). Such opposing views or conflicts enable scholars to clarify the modes of theatre, drama and specify the organic connections between the two, namely, their mutual reliance upon presentation of forms of human activity. Theoretical basis, according to Bernard Beckerman, “possesses the quality of fruitfulness which provides a generative and provocative stimulus for the exploration of dramatic theory” (30). Theoretical basis also offers the opportunity to explore the distinctions between theatrical and dramatic activity and to appreciate the give-and-take inherent between non-dramatic theatrical activity and dramatic theatrical activity.

Theoretical framework, therefore, establishes a vantage point, a perspective, a set of lenses through which the researcher views the problem. By so

doing, the selection of a logical framework become imperative and is both a classifying and exclusionary step in the research process (Marx Weber, 1 of 7).

To this end, the use and application of the theory of Dialectic Materialism as propounded by Karl Marx for this study becomes exigent and imperative. Since this work's main focus is to determine the degree of Marxist spirit in the works of Femi Osofisan, Marxism and dialectical materialism will be explained. Karl Marx is the father of this universal movement known as Marxism. Initially, Marx's ideas were dismissed as irrelevant but today, his ideas have resurfaced time without number, challenging the unusual, unjust and exploitative nature of capitalist system. In order to change these capitalist tendencies, Marx's ideas came into force – a body of work collectively described as Marxism.

For anyone seeking to change the world in a socialist direction, the ideas of Marxism are a vital, even indisputable tool and weapon to assist the working class in its struggle to change society. Marxism recognizes that revolutionary theory is incomplete in itself, the praxis, the operation of that theory when power is seized by a revolutionary party that professes the theory is what constitutes the infallible test of that theory (Wole Soyinka, forward). As Ken Smith enunciates, "Marxism adds to an understanding of the capitalist world and how to change it (1). Change is the bedrock of Marxist ideas. No wonder Marx described capitalism as evil and called for its change while resorting to socialism. As Karl Marx himself has said, and which Marxists are fond of repeating - the philosopher has only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is, however, to change it (2).



Marxism is also the political and economic theories that explain the changes and developments in society as the result of opposition between the social classes. It is regarded as the science of perspective that anticipates how society will develop – using its method of dialectical materialism to unravel the complex processes of historical development. It endeavours to teach the working class to know itself and be conscious of itself as a class. Great social revolutions in the past have been carried out by emerging minorities who best articulated the new economic and political needs of the rising class. History is made by conscious men and women, each driven by definite motives and desires. Therefore, the struggle for socialism is qualitatively different as it involves the conscious participation of the majority – the world's working class and oppressed masses. Standing on our way, Robin Clapp laments, is diseased capitalism (20).

Dialectical Materialism, according to Clapp, “is a theory used in the explanation of Marxist ideas” (6). It is a science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought which was and remains a revolutionary philosophy, challenging capitalism in every sphere and substituting science for dreams and prejudice (Robin Clapp, 6). Dialectical materialism will form our bases for this study more especially as Leon Trotsky admonishes that, “if theory correctly estimates the course of development and foresees the future better than other theories, it remains the most advanced theory of our time, be it even scores of years old” (5).

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **2.0 Introduction:**

Literature review enables the researcher the opportunity to present and evaluate individual contributions of scholars in their particular field of study, in order to ascertain what has been achieved and what remains to be achieved. This study will, therefore, focus on the Concept of Marxism, Femi Osofisan's Marxist Ideals, and the Limitation of Femi Osofisan's plays as Marxist Template.

#### **2.1 The Concept of Marxism:**

Karl Heinrich Marx (1818 – 1883) a German social scientist, historian and a revolutionary is considered to be the father of Marxism. Although the idea for which he fought for predated him, it is obvious that he popularized and engenders its application. Though many times the ideas of Karl Marx has been dismissed by his critics as irrelevant, yet interests in his ideas, especially after his death, has resurfaced and blossomed geometrically which challenges the unusual, unjust and exploitative nature of capitalist system. In order to change those capitalist tendencies, Ken Smith submits that, “a body of work collectively described as Marxism came into force (1).

Marxism was championed by Marx's closest associate Federick Engels and supported by the works of Lenin and Trotsky who led the 1917 October Russian Revolution. The nucleus of Marxism is on social change or

revolutionary aesthetics. This is why Karl Marx himself have said, and which Marxists are fond of repeating that, “the philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is, however, to change it (Ken Smith 2). Therefore, for anyone seeking to change the world in a socialist direction, the ideas of Marxism are a vital, even indispensable tool and weapon to assist the working class in its struggle to change society. Marxist ideas add to an understanding of the capitalist world and how to change it. Considering the invaluable nature of Marxism, Smith believes that, “Marx’s ideas are once again becoming fashionable even amongst people Marx (himself) would have regarded as his political enemies” (1). To the socialists who wish to permanently expunge capitalism and establish a global socialist system, Smith further notes that:

They look at Marxism not just for understanding but Marxism help them to understand the present struggles of the working class and oppressed masses around the world and anticipate the most likely course of events in future (Importance of Marxism 1).

Marxism has been described in varying perspectives, all of which point at changing the status quo between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and enthroning a classless society. It is also a philosophy aimed at expunging all traces of exploitative and oppressive tendencies of the

government against the governed. Terry Eagleton in summarizing Marx's philosophy of the world says:

Marxism is a scientific theory of human societies and of the practice of transforming them – meaning that the narrative Marxism has to deliver is the story of the struggles of men and women to free themselves from certain forms of exploitation and oppression (49).

This view is supported by the work of Saint Gbileeka while reflecting on the aesthetic ideas of Marx and Engels that, Marxism is a philosophy of praxis which aims at the radical transformation of human reality based on a dialectical interpretation of history. Such a transformation being “to establish a society in which humanity can give free reign to its essential powers, frustrated, denied, postponed and emasculated for so long” (40).

Marxism has also been described as a theory of the nature of history and politics as well as a prescription for revolutionary action to bring the industrial working class to power and create a classless society (The Encyclopedia Americana 388). It has been the basic postulations of Karl Marx that economic forces of production will determine the form of social classes... that the society has for long been dominated by a ruling class of property owners who exploited the lower class. Based on the laws of the dialectic, each social system generates the forces that will destroy it and create a new system with political revolution and the emergence of a new class making each transition. These postulations of Marx have been the high

point of attack by many anti-Marxists who doubted the attainable of a classless society. They reasoned that with the widening gap between the haves and have-nots, between the rulers and the ruled, between the poor and the rich nations of the world, the diseased capitalism which Marx sought to overthrow in place of socialism may be difficult to attain.

The World Book Encyclopedia emphasizes the postulative and predictive nature of Marx's theory where even his Communist Manifesto of 1848 considers history to be a series of conflicts between classes and predicts that the ruling middle class will be overthrown by the working class. The result of this revolution, Marx and Engels posit, "will be a classless society in which the chief means of production are publicly owned" (235).

Marx believed that all history is a struggle between the ruling and working classes, and all societies have been torn by this conflict. This conflict(s) is gathering momentum as past and present societies tried to keep the exploited class under control by using elaborate political organizations, laws, customs, traditions, ideologies, religions and rituals. By recognizing these forces, Marx reasoned that, "people will be able to overcome them through revolutionary action" (235).

Marx's revolutionary predictions which eventually germinated as manifested in the Old French and German revolutions have resurfaced and picked fire in many parts of the world today. Recently, it has taken place in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and currently even more devastating

in Syria. Even some of the world powers like Britain, China, Russia, German, Greece, etc have had their own doses of calls for revolutionary change at present.

From the above, does one need to ask if Marxism is alive or dead? The answer is emphatic Yes. Marxism is alive and on course. For as Charles E. Bressler alludes:

Down came Berlin Wall, down came the Iron Curtain, and supposedly down came Marxism as acceptable alternative forms of government to capitalism and as an acceptable world-view. At this many capitalist rejoiced for they thought Marxism has fallen (161).

However, an internet search for the word “Marxism” shows thousand of listing result sites, meaning that Marxism was given a death knell prematurely. Many intellectuals, politicians, and others, according to Bressler, are continually fascinated with Marxism even more than when the death knell was prematurely passed (161). As a matter of fact, the self-same problems that gave rise to Marxism still exist today.

An intricate web of social relationships evolves when a few people monopolize the means of production and arrogate to themselves, the status of employer while many others become the employees. The employers who now have the economic, social and political powers will eventually articulate their beliefs, their values and even their art. Consciously or unconsciously, they will

force these ideas or what Marx called their ideologies, on the proletariat. This upper class will go ahead to develop and control the superstructure where the rich become richer, and the poor becomes poorer. To rid society of such situation, Marxism advocates for the government to own all industries and control the economic production of a country to protect the people from the exploitation and oppression of the bourgeoisie. This is the hallmark and ethno-centric focus of Marx's ideas in which he believes that change can only be achieved through revolution. Revolution, Cliff Slaughter argues, "brings with it euphoric and even ecstatic moods, expressive of the hope that the day of freedom is at hand" (9).

## **2.2 Literature and Social Change:**

This section reviews and identifies the place of literature, particularly the theatre as a weapon for economic, social and political change in the society. Behind this movement is the poet or writer. For the poet speaks not for himself only but for his fellow men. For as George Thompson explains, "his cry is their cry, which only he can utter. That is what gives it depth. But if he is to speak for them, he must suffer with them, rejoice with them, work with them, fight with them. Otherwise, what he says will not appeal to them and so will lack significance" (65).

The writer occupies an enviable position in his society. His is a catalyst and pace-setter for social change. Many writers like Hegel, Marx, Engels, Aristotle, Shakespeare, and many others at different periods have wielded their

intellectual influence through the instrumentality of the pen to salvage their societies from the shackles of exploitation and oppression by successive authoritarian regimes.

Contributing to Marxist Aesthetics, Lenin advocates that, “literature by itself should not be an enterprise that would bring material benefits to the people.” Rather, artist (writers) should join other progressives in fighting the cause of the proletariat. That the politically conscious artist should, chart the course of revolutionary struggle (53). What Lenin meant is that, literature should not be used for commercial intent, but to fight societal ills pervading the society. The society no doubt, is bedeviled, with numerous societal problems such as injustice, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, oppression, exploitation, privatization and commercialization of public enterprises, and the *deceased capitalism*, according to Marx which he had called for its overthrow. This dominant class’ evils against the toiling class are common in Africa as well as other Third World countries.

In the view of Maxwell A. E. Okoli, “some people still cling to the old believe that literature cannot bring about social change while also reducing the writer as a mere impresario. Since the inception of the eighteen century, all these perceptions have changed. According to him, “great writers work for progress; a social crusader who has transformed into a pathfinder, a leader, a revolutionary who have aroused men from their apathy and servile sentence, to deliver them



from the spell of enslaving traditions, religions, dogmatism and political dictatorship” (72).

The writer is a light-bearer for the people who pull the revolutionary change that leaves society better, stronger, wiser, and more progressive. Like the Prometheus, Okoli asserts that, “the writer is prepared to hand fire to men” (72). Literature has proved to be a great catalyser of unhappy social situations, and a weapon for cultural change culminating in a revolution. Literature to Bertolt Brecht, “has to be committed; has to be militant and outspoken. To be effective too, literature should employ whatever is useful through modernist or formalist approach.” On the other hand, Brecht advocates that, “the popular artist who wants to influence his society must turn away from down-turn stages to the neighborhood where he can meet people who are interested in changing society.”(Saint Gbilekaa, 44).

Marxism as a philosophy is greatly dedicated to the struggle for social emancipation and the destruction of capitalism by the working class. In the same vein, art within the Marxist philosophy is conceived as a partner in arms in the struggle for the attainment of this noble objective. To achieve this, committed writers are needed – writers with a sense of obligation or a strong attachment to a course. Speaking of a writer’s commitment, Chinua Achebe submits that, “commitment means attachment to particular social aims and the use of his writing to advance social aims” (72). This, of course, implies a belief that literature can

and should be used as a force for social change, and a writer has a responsibility to do so, he emphasized.

In their search for a better and more humane society, M.A.E. Okoli explains that, “writers assigned themselves the noble task to educate and inform, dispel ignorance superstition and myth: to liberate the mind and enthrone reason and critical appreciation of society, its institutions and values” (73).

Against this background, writers mirror the society and help men and women to think and act in a particular direction. In a bid to conjure up in the mind the militant attributes of the pen and brings into focus the importance of the writer and, indeed, literature in the planting and realization of revolutions, Balzac comparing himself to Napoleon Bonaparte, had claimed that, “he would accomplish with the pen, what Napoleon started with the sword (Literature and Social Change: The Instance of French Revolution 73).

The writer, especially Nigerian writer should not only know his environment – his immediate constituency but should in the words of Emmanuel Obiechina, “be a reformist and a crusader for social justice, for the rights of the individual, for the rationalization of life and for the dispelling of ignorance and superstition and all those forces upon which the oppressors and exploiters have played over the centuries in their attempt to hold the people down” (4).

What Obiechina is saying is that such a writer should have in-depth allegiance to the down-trodden in the Nigerian society, to the socially handicapped, to the

women, the children, the unemployed, the sick and all those who are not able to fight their battles. He should take position against the oppression of the people in all forms of brutalities and of unwarrantable violence against the masses. Should be vocal against national hypocrisy, against those who pretend to love the country but are busily stealing the public goods and converting the country's numerous resources to their private use. Such a writer should also be dedicated to the promotion of a healthy, virile and life-sustaining culture – using his medium to fight decadence, falsification of values, degradation of cultural institutions and the emasculation of peoples' way of life (6).

There is really great power flowing through the pen. For through it many countries, especially Africa, have got their freedom from the arm-twisting grip of colonialism. African nationalists like Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Patrice Lumumba (Zaire), Nkwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Leopold Sedar-Senghor (Senegal), Felix Houphouët-Boigny, among other African nationalists have at their primes made their countries proud through the power of the pen to fight colonialism to a standstill. Through their hostile editorials they hastened the exit from the political scene the imperial masters. They have used the press as an essential instrument in achieving their cause. The indigenous press, developed as a political instrument, an organizational tool for moulding a political organization, and in time, played an indispensable role in the struggle for independence. Moreover, the theme of protest, not necessarily of news and information has shaped the African press to date.

The pen and indeed, the poet have the capability of shaping the destiny of his society. It is in his capacity as a militant against social evils and injustices against tyranny and oppression, against religious fanaticism and political despotism that the writer most often transforms his pen into a flaming sword of crusade. Expressing the indefatigable nature of the writer and the force behind the pen, Okoli submits that, “the heroic symbol of power and rugged will, the pen, in its ambivalence, is capable of spreading knowledge and enlightenment or sowing discord and panic” (74). He believes that the pen can translate social sensibilities and aspirations and harness them into actions of revolt, liberation or subjugation; reconstruction or destruction. For the writer, he further argues that:

The pen and indeed, literature, is essentially the writer, maker of literature, manipulator of the pen, of words and ideas, of theories and ideologies. One, who gives pleasure, arouses sentiments, evoke dreams or inspire odium and anarchy (74).

Through the instrumentality of the duo – the writer and the pen, Marx’s postulations have become fulfilled in many societies through revolutionary change. The down-trodden of these nations, starved and exploited for a long time and gained nothing from the general enrichment of the period, rose in arms and vented their plebeian anger against the bourgeoisie whose overwhelming comfort and privileges showed the fragility of a civilization founded on class and mass exploitation.

### **2.3 Femi Osofisan's Marxist Ideals:**

Theatre since the time of Marx and Engels has taken a definite ideological stance in respect of the class struggle between the dominant and the toiling class. Like their western counterparts, African writers have engaged Marxist analysis of society in both the conventional and popular theatre to review and expose the class war and even recommend a revolt against the decadent social order that oppressed the masses.

One of such writers is Femi Osofisan whose encomiums and accolades as man of the people, a radical writer and a Marxist have no bound. It is based on these togas that this section seeks to review and determine the degree of his works as a Marxist template.

Femi Osofisan belongs to the second generation of Nigerian dramatists. A critical perspective of his kind of drama shows a radical revolutionary perspective on contemporary socio-political issues. According to Muyiwa P. Awodiya, Osofisan plays are revolutionary in that they propose radical political alternatives for the present social order (24). Like other Nigerian writers, his plays first and foremost, protest the wanton and decadent social order. Awodiya maintains that the thrust of the revolt of the second generation of Nigerian writers, to which Osofisan emerged as 'heir apparent', "is to use literature as a weapon of social change" (25).

Osofisan devotes his plays to championing the proletariat revolt against oppressive state structures. His drama charges the poor and the down-trodden to

shake off the shackles of docile acceptance of the tyranny and authority, and rebuff the oppressor and all his agents. The plays seek to evoke instant change by inciting the audience to action, using theme and language as vehicles. The main objective for such usage, according to Awodiya, “is to dislodge and alter the status quo, by sensitizing the oppressed to revolt against the oppressor” (25).

Re-echoing the themes of most African writers, especially that of Osofisan, Saint Gbilekaa describes two variants of radical theatre – the conventional western theatre as manifest in the plays of Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Githae Mugo, Ebrahim Husseni and Rugyendo in East Africa. While Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Kole Omotoso and Ola Rotimi represent the Nigerian block whose audiences are predominantly literate and their themes clear and specific that, “capitalism must be monstrously overthrown through debunking a system of capitalist myths to bring about a socialist order” (introd.).

The second variant is the community or popular theatre which, like the radical literary drama, is a theatre of conscientization – awakening the consciousness of the rural masses to understand the societal configurations as well as having faith in themselves as vectors of change. Gbilekaa also describes popular theatre as a theatre of pedagogy, liberation and revolution underlined by Marxist aesthetics. As a consummate artist, Femi Osofisan oscillates between both variants. As Femi Osofisan himself argues, the burning patriotic ideals of these writers are:

To use the weapon we had – our pen, our zeal, and our eloquence – to awaken in our people the song of the liberation. With our writing, we would wash away the stigma of inferiority, rouse our dormant energies, unmask the pests and traitors among us, and preach the positive sermons. Our works would be a weapon in the struggle to bring our country to the foremost ranks of modern nations. Our songs would call for radical political alternatives (1).

Plays of the 1970s to date were written not merely for entertainment but to reflect certain ideological positions or to condemn in its entirety, decadent socio-political practices of the power block. The playwrights of the two variant schools of theatre practices spear-headed by the Osofisans, did not only highlighted the problems by way of satires, but provided ways of avoiding and solving by going to the roots – the economic and social heart of the matters (Saint Gbilekaa, introd.).

Femi Osofisan's plays mostly comment on the social, political, economic or religious nature of the social system. This is best exemplified in his play *Morountodun*. *Morountodun* specifically comments on the economic situation in Nigeria where the bourgeoisie exploits and oppresses the masses. In the text, the struggle for survival between the upper class and the lower class is laid bare. While the upper class continues to tighten their stranglehold on the poor masses, the latter strive to get themselves free from

the control of the upper class. This struggle is achieved through revolution against the oppressors.

As a Marxist or revolutionary writer, Osofisan according to Lawal Oshioke, “strongly believes that for harmonious co-existence, the system of deprivation that makes people poor through exploitation must be changed through forceful means” (5). Osofisan believes as well as recommends that, the overthrow of any draconian government that dehumanizes and exploits the masses could be a viable solution to the exploitation in the social system. Osofisan’s works also highlight the necessity for the masses to struggle both from the cultural and political perspectives and to express consciousness towards the fight against oppression. The continuous struggles of the oppressed against their oppressor will certainly lead to justice one day, no matter the adamant nature of the oppressor. In Osofisan’s *Morountodun*, the audience is faced with the peasant farmer’s revolt against what they described as exploitation and of the government against the people.

As a Marxist idealist, Osofisan’s themes center mostly on revolution, collaboration, blackism, compassion, women, treachery, corruption, injustice and oppression, love, determination, self-reliance and perseverance (The Drama of Osofisan: A Critical Perspective 80). To feel the pulse of his Marxist stance, Osofisan’s suggestion in *Morountodun* is that, “whenever the people are faced with the exploitative and oppressive antics of the dominant



class, the best option is to resist and the best way to do this is to attack, perhaps, through violence where negotiation fails.

Lawal Oshioke is of the view that, “the major aim of drama is to create awareness within a given society by shunning any form of skepticism”(6). A dramatic piece aimed at concretizing the people has to take sides with the masses in order to expose the evils perpetrated by the ruling class in the society as can be found in some of the works of Femi Osofisan. Revolutionary writers from all intent and purposes are to bring about change in the society. As a form of literature, drama has been found to be a very useful instrument in this direction of conscientization and indeed, a desirable tool for mobilizing the people for a revolution.

Osofisan, no doubt, advocates not only change but a violent change as a catalyst to say no to oppression. Revolution against the oppressors is the best way to solve problems between the oppressed and the oppressors. It is also persistent revolutions that usually bring peace, according to Osofisan.

Pontificating on Osofisan’s Marxist inclination, Harry Garuba points to the fact that he has emerged clearly as a revolutionary ideologue and the most consciously intertextual Nigerian playwright, basing his work on the idea of cultural renaissance and nationalism. Osofisan queried and has continued to question the treachery and the travesties of the ruling class. The dominant class has always been the focal point of his dramaturgy. No wonder he advocates radical social changes based on this ideological position.

The political agenda of most African countries and Nigeria in particular are reflected in most of Osofisan's works which, are characteristic not just by their accent on political commitment but also, according to Chidi Amuta, on a "certain ideological predilection that is class-partisan and sees socio-political salvation mainly in terms of the revolutionary transformation of society" (167). In fighting this socio-political war, Osofisan places the under-privileged in the centre of his dramatic creations by engaging them in an excursion to find meaning into the contradictions prevalent in the society. He applies the theme of the sufferings of the poor under successive ruthless tyrants to the African countries' chequered history of exploitation and oppression.

In his efforts to mirror these societal maladies, Osofisan expresses the popular demands for democracy in African continent. But does democracy work in this part of the world? Democracy to Marxists is a sham because despite all the fine talk about equality before the law, the common good, and freedom for all, it gives the substance of freedom to the rulers but only 'formal' freedom to the common man. In the opinion of H. B. Mayo, "the workers are only 'formally' free and equal, because of their economically exploited position, as shown by their low wages, poverty, insecurity, and their inability to do more than vote every few years for a choice of master" (291). Mayo sees the political business of the worker to just consist in paying taxes. Or as Lenin puts it, "to decide once every few years which

member of the ruling class to repress and oppress the people through parliament.”

The liberal state is a ‘paradise’ for the rich, a snare and deception for the poor, the freedom it gives, says Mayo, is like the freedom for the slave owners in ancient Greece (291).

The capitalists control the economic power, and in turn control the state in their own interest. They also control even the press and all organs of propaganda, thus, able to manufacture public opinion as they wish they control elections. Against this background, Marxists came to the conclusion that, real liberty is impossible under capitalism and the only way out is to overthrow capitalism and of bourgeois democracy.

In some of the studies and critiques on Osofisan in relation to some of his plays like *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, *The Chattering and the Song*, *Yugba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*, among others, they have been described as revolutionary, not only in terms of language but also in their commitment to an alternative ideological perspective. To achieve a mythopoetic essence, therefore, he draws heavily on African myths, history and ritual forms whose repertory he has dialectically raided and subverted to propose an alternative ideological position. To buttress this further, Tejumola Olaniyan agrees that:

Osofisan’s plays are characterized by deft appropriation and re-interpretation of indigenous performance forms, a fine-tuned

materialist vision of history and a consummate dramaturgic sophistication and openness (74).

Osofisan, therefore, navigates into the realm of myths, history, as well as the contemporary environment to engage in an ideological stance about his society in a way that is both revolutionary and subversive. His recourse to myths and history is not for nothing – to question the political tyranny which serves to distance and shelter the writer from the menace of present terrors, from the tyranny in the corridors of power on the African continent. As Sola Adeyemi posits:

One of the leading African dramatists whose radical ideological stance and commitment to a just and free society manifests in a continual questioning of societal anguish against the background of an endemic mythopoetic construct is Femi Osofisan (3).

By effectively engaging in contemporary historical facts in an intertextual polemics, these materials are subverted to realize his creative impulse. The recourse to myths and history by Osofisan, is to question the political high-handedness is meant to distance and shelter the dramatist from the menace of terrors and other tyrants in the corridors of power.

The works of Osofisan like that of Bertolt Brecht are characterized by the conviction that society could be transformed, for change is attainable particularly through conscious political action. It is a political war not fought

with the barrels of the gun. For as Osofisan believes, “though plays do not have the power to topple governments, but they can in the words of the Latin American writer, Mario Vargas Llosa, “become a meaningful and positive activity, which depicts the scars of reality and prescribes remedies, frustrating official lies so that the truth shines through” (29). Like Osofisan, many writers over the ages have used instrument of their arts to wrestle power from obstructive, destructive, exploitative and even oppressive regimes. The nationalist movements in Africa, for instance, had through their hostile editorials during the colonial period fought colonialism to a standstill before independence was given to them. In their search for a better and more humane society, writers assigned to themselves the noble task to educate and inform, to dispel ignorance, superstition and myth, to liberate the mind and enthrone reason and critical appreciation of society. Particularly, works that are politically engaging and combative, according to Femi Osofisan, “could teach resistance and compassion, beat back despair by upholding faith in the future, and construct an incisive code of courage” (69).

The above notions and features of people-oriented political and social commitment and ideological focus are the fundamental concerns of the radical modernist dramatists. Therefore, as a radical modernist writer, Osofisan searches for an alternative revolutionary motif distinct from the traditional mode of dramaturgy, to revolt sometimes unnoticeably and quickly against terror and opposition. To achieve these feats, Mohammed O.

Bhadmus records that, Osofisan borrows within the household of drama itself by appropriating the use of metaphor and parable, of satire and burlesque, of riddle and aphorism, of magic and dissembling, which can shelter a statement from the erasing hands of censorship, from the mar of the emperor's discontent (69).

Muyiwa P. Awodiya supports the view that Osofisan is not only a humanist but a radical writer who believes that everyman be born free and equal with a right to life and to the means of maintaining that life. That change and progress can only be achieved by the people and not through any divine intervention. He also believes that, anybody who labours must enjoy the fruits of his labour while nobody should exploit the labour of others for his personal enrichment (38). Drawing inference from some developed nations, Osofisan believes that writers should use the pen, zeal and eloquence to awaken in our people the song of liberation that would call for radical political alternatives.

In line with Awodiya, Biodun Jeyifo and D. S. Izevbaye both have strong tendency toward Osofisan's Marxist leaning for the society. Whereas Jeyifo sees him as an unquestionable man of the left, a radical writer and critic who have embraced a class approach to the production and reception of literature. Izevbaye on the other hand, observes that Osofisan has a strong sympathy for Marxist ideas about politics and society; that a country like

Nigeria certainly needs revolutionary stance on the part of its writers to make possible a new egalitarian society (The Drama of Femi Osofisan 39).

From the foregoing, it is evident that, Awodiya, Jeyifo and Izevbaye are unanimous in their opinions that Osofisan is a Marxist ideologue who leans very strongly towards the materialist world-view and appropriating religion from the perspective of his revolutionary philosophy.

Modupe O. Olaogun writing on the *Parables in the Theatre*, describes Osofisan as a socialist and like Bertolt Brecht, aims at channeling his artistic talents to the service of social revolution (45). By using suitable forms, Osofisan is of the view that, theatre should not only provide entertainment, but should also kick start a debate and make the epic theater concept, as propounded by Brecht, appropriate to many of his concerns.

### **Limitation of Femi Osofisan's Plays as a Marxist Template:**

Though some scholars from the above antecedents, have recorded that Osofisan is a complete Marxist, it is the tendency of this research work to review and interrogate these prevailing assumptions and to argue that some of his texts lack Marxist spirit to a significant degree. To support this argument, we shall solicit the views of some critics against these claims.

First in this category is Dapo Adelugba who argues in line with the tenet of this research work that, though Femi Osofisan espouses Marxian doctrines, such doctrines are inadequate to classify him as a Marxist as propagated by many critics who are unable to justify such description. Thus,

Adelugba emphasis, “I would rather say that his work is proto-Marxian” (39). Adelugba’s view is that Osofisan is not a pure Marxist but expresses Marxist tendencies based on his appropriation of intertexts, or borrowings from other writers. Like Brecht, he is multi-dimensional which accounts for their popularity and as well as the controversies surrounding their works.

The ambiguity in their works, resulting from such borrowings, according to Tess Akaeke Onwueme, “connotes multiplicity of meanings and forms that oscillate between old and new theatricalities, between liberal and radical ideologies, between retrogressive and progressive world-views” (63). A thorough examination of Brecht and Osofisan’s works also show that they have contempt for traditional or liberal humanist drama which sees human nature as fixed and unchanging. Yet they find it difficult to depart completely from it. Whereas Brecht deploys the epic theatre in contradistinction to the traditional order, Osofisan deploys popular theatre tradition to a similar effect. Onwueme, therefore, argues that in spite of their innovativeness and experimentations, they do not achieve a clean break from the traditional liberal humanist theatrical modes and their attendant problematics. Rather their hybridity and hybridization of theatrical traditions have created aporia in the very process of filling the gaps created by earlier works and dramatists (62).

Osofisan’s theatre is not only a continuation of the conventional literary, popular or indigenous drama forms. It is rather a fusion of old and



new forms. Apart from oscillating between the tenets of traditional liberal humanist theatre and modernist radical aesthetics, Osofisan's dramatic theory of aesthetics, are sometimes compromised by practice. He is also inadvertently enmeshed in the same practices of some of the theatre greats he initially criticized. For instance, while Brecht has contempt for the Elizabethan theatre and Shakespeare which he reconsidered later, Osofisan took to Soyinka's plays than any other dramatist in the same sense (*Visions of Myth in Nigerian Drama: Femi Osofisan vs. Wole Soyinka* 72).

To Niyi Osundare, what one talk about in Osofisan's plays are tendencies, not hard-and-fast or a clear-cut ideological stance... they contain tendencies that range from liberal through the radical to the revolutionary (26). What Osundare is saying is that, it is difficult to place Osofisan's plays as pure Marxism or otherwise considering the nature of his plays. Even Muyiwa P. Awodiya, a stout defender of Osofisan's Marxist ideals surprisingly shares Osundare's view and says that, "although Osofisan's plays advocate social change, they do not have a clear-cut ideological leaning" (38). In addition, they cover a wide range of doctrines and as a result, critics differ markedly in their opinions in categorizing them. Thus, they regard the plays as ideologically ambiguous because of the difficulty in placing them appropriately. This conforms to the thesis of this work that Osofisan's plays lack Marxist spirit to a significant degree. In line with Onwueme's thinking, Mohammed O. Bhadmus posits that, "difference,

departure and even superiority are too hastily read into Osofisan's plays (73). Such a tendency as a matter of fact, does not explain or expunge the aporia which is germane to the discourse of modernist theatre. This hurried assumptions are made by these critics as a result of what Norbert Oyibo Eze describes as "commitment to predetermined schema, which hardly affords the critics the opportunity to treat individual plays as unique literary creations, nor to know certain plays of a given playwright that maintain a tradition, and those that depart from the tradition (21). A work of art ought to be well-read, well-examined and well-analyzed in order to determine its proper ideological bent as suggested above. Even in cultural engagement whether radical or liberal, tendencies are in constant flux. Bhabha (1994), therefore, suggests that, "representation of difference should not be hastily read as if pre-given in the fixed tablets of tradition" (73).

According to Saint Gbilekaa, Osofisan's theatre is eminently practical, a tendency that has made him to subvert both myth and history, using them as pegs to hang his ideological and political idiosyncrasy"(74). He further describes Osofisan's theatre as a theatre of possibility where man commands and the gods obey. This, however, abnegate myths to the supremacy of concrete history as the gods ought to command for man to obey. This subversive technique of Osofisan creates ambiguity to the audience who may not be adequately conversant with his style of writing.

Supporting Osofisan's deployment of traditional materials from the subversive materialist perspective, Awodiya reasons that, Osofisan does so not from the tradition, superstitions, metaphysical or subservient attitude but borrows ancient forms specifically to unmask them by using theatrical magic to undermine the magic of superstition and metaphysical, the gods and their pretended inviolateness (140). He believes that Osofisan's use of magic and religion on the stage is merely as theatrical devices. But the implication is that, in the process, the belief in them is undermined.

It has also been argued that Osofisan's plays are fund of identifying problems without proffering solutions to them, while throwing the equation back to the audience to find the solutions themselves. A substantial number of these plays probe the socio-political and economic injustices in the society. For instance, in *Once upon Four Robbers*, which centered around the debate on the public execution of armed robbers in Nigeria, Osofisan advances the argument that it is in fact the society that is criminal minded. He rationalizes that there is no reason behind executing armed robbers while neglecting fraudulent civil servants, corrupt law officers, politicians and profiteers, but he stops short of prescribing an alternative solution. Instead, he throws the argument back to the audience to resolve, a device he also used, according to Sola Adeyemi, in *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (5). This attitudinal stance of Osofisan's works contradict markedly his believe that, it is not enough to confront the audience with specific social issues or

problems, but it is imperative to mediate in the course of history and history-making, and provide the audience with politically viable alternatives (Drama and Commitment to Politics in the American Theatre of the Thirties 4). This is because as G. Rabkin submits:

Great art... must be definition, deal with more than recording of details, it must, in the nature of the case comment, and drama, in particular, demands not only explanation, but resolution as well (4).

The writer in order to fulfill his art and to be really committed, therefore, should be an intellectual – someone who is concerned with the problems of the country and who is deeply committed to helping to find answers for those problems. He is also like a man, who probes the body and tissue of the contemporary scene, discovers the dead or dying cells, locates the diseased organs and prepares the ground for the surgical operation to restore the body to health and new life. Above all, the writer according to Emmanuel Obiechina, is a unique fellow in the society who functions as a sensitive point in the exploration, evaluation, validation, clarification and, sometimes, sacrifice of the way of life shared by the human community” (2-3).

The lesson to learn from the foregoing is that, writers should not only involve themselves in identifying problems, but should as well find solutions to the socio-political and economic ills pervading their societies.

In a collection of essays in honour of Femi Osofisan titled *Portrait of an Eagle*, Victor Ukaegbu one of the most critical of Osofisan's works faults Osofisan for creating fictional women in his work who fail to transcend the culturally constructed patriarchal myths and stereotypes that locate them always on the margins of the society. Citing *Morountodun* for instance, Osofisan create a woman character (Moremi) that is unable to rise above the human frailties she berates in others, although those shortcomings are found whenever unproven polemics and self-preservation collide (184-5). The effect is that, in *Moroundotun*, Moremi's action is said to be debilitating and hardly enhances her revolutionary credentials.

Tejumola Olaniyan reviewing Osofisan's plays through a feminist perspective asserts that, through such representational emphasis the playwright charted an alternative course of portrayal of women in Nigerian, and indeed, African drama. But in a twist of irony, he proceeds to identify what he calls "Osofisan's ambiguities in his portrayal of women as well as what he perceives as the sources of such ambiguities (67). Chidi Amuta classifies the plays of Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande as dramatic literature that is politically committed on certain ideological predilection that is "class-partisan and sees socio-political salvation mainly in terms of revolutionary transformation" (176).

To this end, Oyin Ogunba warns on the danger of over reliance on Marxist criticism in the study of African literature because "Marxism is a

creed that promises more than it can deliver” (5). Uche Nwaozuzu shares similar view while reviewing critically the characterization of Sowande and Osofisan’s plays. He views that, “the duo exposes their characters as heroes driven by personal fears to promise more than they can deliver to the masses” (25). Re-echoing what Abiola Irele sees as “the quest for coherence in literary works on purely technical grounds as a “very dangerous procedure,” Nwaozuzu observes that “a lot of pioneering works on Osofisan and Sowande suffer from this tendency” (25). He explains further that such scholars tried to impinge mere Marxist significations in their interpretation of their works and also canonized their radicals as positive heroes. This is evidence in the characters of Titubi and Marshal in *Morountodun* and the robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers*.

Dapo Adelugba submits that, “although the Marxist point of view has its value but this has been overdone” (64). As far as he is concerned, Marxist theory has a certain kind of blind spot in the sense that all theatre and all artistic work must be taken into their sense of perception. This is because not every work theoretically setting out to transform society ends up transforming it in a kind of total way that the Marxist would like. He believes that the leftist-oriented dramaturgy has influenced us in Africa but in talking about theatre of the people, it is not necessarily Marxist theatre. The theatre of the people is that which mixes most dynamically with the psyche of a people ... the theatre of the people is that theatre which reaches directly

the largest proportion of a people. “A theatre of the people is the theatre which echoes the heartbeats and aspirations of the people,” he asserts (65).

According to Emeka Nwabueze, “both Osofisan and Sowande are equally concerned with contemporary issues notably exploitation and oppression of the masses by the feudal class” (23). However, Osofisan outclasses others in terms of multi-thematic exploration and dramaturgical innovations. These playwrights see the society as a coercive system where privileged segments of the society benefit from social arrangements at the expense of the less privileged groups. Nwabueze further submits that, “these playwrights offer revolution as the only solution to the problem, but such revolutions are portrayed in a simplistic manner” (23). Thus, the conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed turned the oppressed into two categories: the revolutionary and the lukewarm rebels. He, therefore, proffered the need to create characters with leadership qualities like Kimathi and Kinjekile rather than mere charlatans.

Chidi Amuta believes that Osofisan’s plays are replete with visible contradictions as well as recurrent feature of stereotypes in characterization (167). While noting the above contradictions, Nwaozuzu believes that the devoted, oppressed radical against the decadent, vile and odious establishment is a too familiar character in the revolutionary plays of Osofisan (14). In the same vein, Biodun Jeyifo wonders why after a more or less entertaining evening of a performance of some of Osofisan’s plays the

audience often asks, what is he saying? What does he propose as the way out? (33). This confirms the view of some scholars that Femi Osofisan is fond of propounding problems without any attempt at proffering solutions, thereby, throwing the equation back to the audience.

In line with the view of Victor Ukaegbu (2008), Wole Soyinka comments on the psychic temperament of the heroes of Sowande and Osofisan to live above their revolutionary goals. Soyinka, therefore, queries that "... the real unvoiced fears is, will the protagonist survive the confrontation with forces that exist within the dangerous area of transformation? - The transformation of the radical from individual to the collective and back (42). It is this socio-psychic dimension of characterization in the plays of Sowande and Osofisan that most critics have perhaps found tasking to articulate in their haste to derive materialist meaning in the lives of the heroes of the plays. This feature creates ambiguous plots and indeterminate characters in the works of these playwrights (Nwaozuzu, 14).



CHAPTER THREE  
**LIMITATIONS OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S PLAYS AS A  
MARXIST MODEL**

This chapter critically reviews the typical attributes of a Marxist play as well as the structural and contextual analysis of the three plays chosen for this study to examine their limitations as a Marxist model.

**3.1 Typical Attributes of a Marxist Play/Drama:**

The nub of Marxism from the foregoing is on social change or revolutionary aesthetics. It is an indispensable tool and weapon to assist the working class in its struggle to change the society, especially in a socialist direction. The proponents of Marxism presumably noted with nostalgia the alarming rate at which the world economy was drifting into capitalist society, thereby creating a division between the “haves” and “have nots.” Hence, they sought for a change from the status quo between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat and enthroning a classless society. Capitalism enthrone economic exploitation, enslavement, marginalization and oppression which many governments use against the governed. No wonder Karl Heinrich Marx himself described capitalism as evil that must be expunged. Marxism, therefore, is a philosophy aimed at obliterating all traces capitalism.

J. V. Stalin citing Karl Marx says that, “men not only act on nature but also on one another” (429). They produce only by co-operating in a certain way and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce,

they enter into definite connections and relations with one another and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature does production take place. In order to produce also, people must have the instruments of production with which food, clothing, shelter, fuel, etc. are produced. Conversely, the people who operate the instruments of production carry on the production of material values with certain production experience and labor-skill. All these elements, according to Stalin, “jointly constitute the production forces of society.”

Marxism emerged at once as a revolutionary transformation and a progressive unification of the society. To this end, Ernest Mandel asserts that, “Marxism does not believe in innate knowledge let alone intuition. Nor does it behave one-sidedly as the ‘educator’ of the proletariat, or the ‘judge’ of the historical movement (the various ups and downs of the class struggle). Instead, Marxism constantly learns from perpetually changing reality. It understands that the educators themselves need to be educated, that only a collective revolutionary praxis, rooted on the one hand in scientific praxis, and on the other in the real situation of the proletariat, can produce this self-education of the revolutionaries and all toiling humanities.

Marxism is a form of communism in which there are two distinctive classes – the production class on one hand, and the working class on the other hand. The idea is that the two classes work together in order to create a society in which there is no real need for currency or private ownership but

instead, it is a society by which both classes work together to achieve common goals.

Two major types of thought abound in Marxist aesthetics. The first being the Instrumental Marxist theory which, revolved around the economic structure. They believe that the economy determines everything and that the same economy promotes the upper class. This school of thought says that the upper class in the society determines how laws are enacted, enforced and what type of punishment should be given. Whereas the Structural Marxist on the other hand, thinks that the laws can be shaped by other means, not just our social or economic status but how to refine our laws, education, economy, religion, morality, among others. This Marxist theory, according to Kfehrie (2004) gives hope to the person born into a lower class family so that they can rise above that class and perhaps, become part of the upper class, given hard work and determination.

Characteristically, Marxist play/drama deals with class analysis. To this end, Marxist themes center on the “haves” and “have nots” in which there is a palpable gulf between the rich and the poor or between the upper and the lower class. The arrangement is such that the proletariat are constantly being manipulated by the bourgeois in a given society leading to what could be regarded as social alienation – a situation where workers are simply regarded as socio-economic aliens in their own environment. As a result, there are always conflicts between the two opposing social class. The

theme of alienation and exile is one of the most persistent themes in the literature of the black world.

Marxist texts point out the inhuman conditions of existence in a capitalist system which results in tensions between the upper and the lower classes. The problem of such plays is human-centered. Human beings create problems for its kind. These create the necessity for change. Such a change or revolution is usually violent in Marxist plays.

Marxist plays are replete with characters with leadership qualities rather than mere charlatans. Such characters or protagonists must be ready to survive the confrontation with the forces that exist within the dangerous terrain of transformation. A kind of transformation of the radical, from individual to the collective and back (Victor Ukaegbu, 42). Marxist characters must be able to rise above human frailties and possess the necessary revolutionary credentials.

Marxist literature avoids the issue of religion but rather deals with concrete history (facts) and not myth or guesses. Myth and history are not subverted in any way for purposes of clarity.

Thematically, Marxist plays are devoid of ambiguities and contradictions. It should not convey multiple interpretations to the audience but uses direct statements. Problems propounded by Marxist texts should be forthcoming with the attendant solutions

Moreover, dialogues in Marxist plays are intra-class rather than inter-class. In effect, dialogue is between two social forces or classes – the oppressed and the oppressor; between a dominant class and a toiling class.

### **3.2 Limitations of *Once Upon Four Robbers*:**

#### **Structural Analysis:**

*Once Upon Four Robbers* is rooted in an unjust society in which Osofisan describes the antagonists (robbers) as a fragment of the Nigerian society who has been dehumanized by social stratification. The delineation of the society into upper and lower classes as a result of the insensitivity and get-rich-quick syndrome of our leaders has produced miscreants like Alhaja, Angola, Major and Hassan. Without doubt, their resort to armed robbery was predicated on poverty, joblessness hunger, etc. because a handful but privileged members of the society have arrogated to themselves the people's sweat. By this act, the advancement of the people and perversion of justice has impeded the citizenry from attaining their aspirations in a land replete with human and material resources. This amounts to oppression and violence which has become inevitable as armed robbery and other social vices become a survivalist tactics.

In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the play shows how the leader of the gang has been executed and being threatened by this development, the other robbers resort to consult with a Muslim farmer, Aafa. The robbers are unable

to rob Aafa due to his magic power. Finding favour in his sight, they received from him a tira, a charm, which could make them become rich if they adhere strictly to the instructions. Each of the robbers is taught about the formula that will be applied to make the tira work. The tira when used puts the people in a state of trance during which they are relieved of their possessions by the invading robbers. The charm is to be used three times – a time sufficient to make the robbers rich, if they use it judiciously. Some of the important conditions of the tira offered by Aafa are that the robbers do not rob poor people (perhaps people in the same social class like them), that they do not rob with violence and that they robe only in public places.

The robbers actually used the tira on market people the first time and make away with a great booty. They also use it a second time following Aafa's instructions and make even greater success. However, as common with most arm robbery groups, one of them (Major) due to desperation and selfishness, violates the gang's ethic, equitable distribution of their booty by robbing others with violence. By violating one of Aafa's conditions, he was arrested by the soldiers who in turn appropriate the spoil. The play rises to a stalemate with the battle shifting between the soldiers and the robbers (instead of the market women) with the attendant suspense on who will win the battle.

### **Contextual Analysis:**

This play text lacks Marxist spirit significantly because in a Marxist play, conflict is waged between two opposing forces – the dominant class and the toiling class. But in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, dialogue is intra-class because there is no character or group of characters that can be rightly be situated in the play as dominant class. It is even erroneous to assume that the soldiers belong to the dominant class for both their utterances and activities contradict such an assumption. In the play the soldiers appear as watchmen in the market. This can be buttressed thus:

**SERGEANT:** You and the others made great profits today, but it's because we've been on our feet all day.

**MAMA ALICE:** Oh I'm grateful, but the day I see you otherwise than thirsty – (calls) Bintu, any wine left or is it all gone? (36).

The dialogue between the Sergeant and Mama Alice portrays the soldiers as wretched, hungry and people who see themselves as underdogs. No wonder they confiscated and appropriated the money seized from the robbers, making themselves the real robbers instead of the robbers who operated under the influence of tira. The conversation between the soldiers explains this better.

**SOLDIER 2:** Na religion, you don't know? We have an abounding faith in miracles; ask any of the flourishing apostles on the beach.

**SOLDIER 1:** Yes, miracles, as long as there are underdogs like me and you to make them happen, Ah, I am tired! (57)

The use of charm (tira) by the robbers in the play forces the play's ideological persuasion towards romanticism rather than to Marxism. Marxist work detests religious sentiment but encourages the working class to abstain from religious enslavement. Against this background, Norbert Oyibo Eze reasons that, "the use of tira in the play is an eloquent testimony of ennobling spirituality and enthroning subjective experience. Its use not only annuls the spirit of supernatural influence and rather than making the play a Marxist text, clearly situates it within the framework of idealism, thereby creating a gulf between Osofisan's theory and praxis" (126).

Thematic obsession is another problem in *Once Upon Four Robbers*. As Uche Nwaozuzu submits, "Osofisan leaves us with no clear picture on whose side the future belongs? He merely gives us characters tormented by the past, filled with violence, death and unfulfilled dreams" (85). The implication is that there is lack of a pitiless demarcation of class in the text.

Furthermore, both myth and history are subverted in this play. For as Saint Gbilekaa posits, "the practicality of Osofisan's theatre, has made him to subvert both myth and history as pegs to hang his ideological and political idiosyncrasy. His is a theatre of possibility where man commands and the gods obey" (75). The implication is that his writings subvert myths to the supremacy of concrete history as the gods ought to command for man to obey.



### **3.3 Limitations in *Morountodun*:**

#### **Structural Analysis:**

Muyiwa P. Awodiya gives a summary of *Morountodun* thus: *Morountodun* is a reconstruction of the Moremi myth and legend of the past adapted by Osofisan to suit his revolutionary view on the political forces of oppression, injustice and corruption in contemporary Nigeria. The play tries to lump together two long but separate historical epochs into one vast drama of struggle, victory, betrayal and hope. It is rooted in the 1969 popular farmers uprising, the Agbekoya Farmers Rebellion, in the old Western Nigeria. In that year, the Yoruba peasant farmers revolted against the oppression and excessive taxation of the government of that region. These illiterate farmers, who were thought all along to be docile, peace-loving, if not even stupid, suddenly took to arms and began to fight against the government. Besides, the farmers also become disenchanted and disillusioned with the establishment for not providing them with social amenities. To make the situation worst, they were perpetually subjected to intimidation by corrupt government officials. Their agonies were both splendid and multifarious, hence their rebellion. The play shows the farmers' collective efforts to protest against bad governance as well as their desire to overthrow the pinnacle of tyranny and brutal force in their society. The play relives government's effort in bringing the situation under control through the efforts of the police and the deceptive disposition of Titubi who agrees to serve as a police informant for the protection

of her class. The aristocratic Titubi in the play, fancying herself as the modern-day Moremi and egged on by the government agent Salami, infiltrates the peasants' ranks as a spy. But after being exposed to the peasants' way of life and experiencing their suffering, she consciously renounces her bourgeois heritage and becomes ideologically transformed to the framers' cause (213). The implication of this sentimental turn around is that Titubi's actions not only oppose Marxist ideology but also shows a character deficient in swimming across the perilous terrain of transformation like a true Marxist character.

The play also shows how two antagonistic camps are contrived in a conflict situation without any hope of resolution. Each camp is doggedly pursuing its class interests to the detriment of the others. However, as it is common in most capitalist societies, the bourgeoisie (government) have an edge over the peasants because the law is on their side – they enact the law, administer the law and also prescribe whatever punishment that should be given.

### **Contextual Analysis:**

*Mourontodun* is an attempt by Femi Osofisan to create a work after Marxist ideals. However, *Morountodun* ran short of pure Marxism but expresses Marxist tendencies. This is in line with Dapo Adelugba's believe that, "Osofisan espouses Marxian doctrines, a doctrine inadequate to classify him as a Marxist as propagated by some critics who are unable to justify such description" (39).

There is character identity problem in the text between the principal characters Titubi and Moremi who incidentally refers to the same person – the Ife queen. This is ambiguous as the audience may not fathom the twist in what seem like a play within a play. Titubi’s statement in Scene Fourteen corroborates this assertion:

**TITUBI:** And that was it. I knew at last that I had won. I knew I had to kill the ghost of Moremi in my belly. Moremi served the state, was the state, and was the spirit of the ruling class. But is not true that the State is always right ... (70).

The playwright fall short of creating a character that is consistent and persistent with the struggle either for or against the class divide. This is because Marxist doctrine demands a clear demarcation between a dominant class and a toiling class. Rather, the epic Titubi (Moremi) oscillates between the two sectors. This view is supported by Victor Ukaegbu who faults Osofisan for creating a woman character that is unable to rise above the human frailties she berates in others (184). In the same way, this human frailty is noticeable even in another major character, Oronmiyon who had persuaded Moremi to abandon the cause of fighting the Igbo warriors. This act of cowardice implicates Oronmiyon as the chief oppressor and negates the spirit of class struggle at a time he ought to be determined, persistent and ferocious as a worthy protagonist.

**ORONMIYON:** (shouting to Moremi) “Stay! I command it.”

This implies that Moremin should abandon the fight. But Moremi in her reaction says: My husband, be yourself. Be the hero you've always been. Like those days when you hurried back from Ijebuland to claim your throne from usurpers. Your exploits refurbish the throne of your ancestors... (38).

Titubi's soft-heartedness towards the peasants and her conscious renouncement of her bourgeois heritage and becoming ideologically transformed to the farmers' cause implicates the playwright by creating a character that is inconsistent and unconscious with her class and pursuit. The result is that Osofisan's concept of class struggle and the critics' claim that he is a consummate Marxist becomes questionable. This is exemplified in the statement by Titubi.

**TITUBI:** I saw myself growing up, knowing no such sufferings as these. With always so much to eat, even servants feed their dogs. Yet here, farmers cannot eat their own products, for they need the money from the market. They tend the yams but dare not taste. They raise the chickens, but must be content with wind in their stomach (66).

In the same vein, Superintendent (Salami) who expresses similar allegiance with the peasants is accused of propaganda and conspiracy against the State whom he works for. He says to Alhaja:

**SALAMI:** I'll tell you. The peasants are strong, and seemingly invincible, because they are solidly united by the greatest force in the world – hunger. They are hungry, their children die of kwashiorkor, and they have risen to say no, no more! (24).

In *Morountodun*, characters like Titubi, Superintendent, Isaac and Buraimoh are found prostituting between the class divide – supporting the State as well as the peasants simultaneously. This contradicts markedly, the Marxist doctrine of conflict between two opposing forces.

Osofisan, no doubt, believes in the power of collectivity in order to conquer the oppressors. But in *Morountodun*, Oronmiyon (Kabieyesi) trusted in the singular miracle of Moremi (the princess) to fight and win the Igbo warriors when he told her: “The secret I have found is you, Moremi (36). This negates the ancient Yoruba Moremi metaphor representing collective struggle. but this is misrepresented by Oronmiyon’s statement above who not only personified but arrogated the collective struggle to one individual. The above also contradicts Marxist principle significantly, for Marxism thrives on collective efforts. This view is supported by Machael A. Lebowitz that, “for Marxism, the parts have no prior independent existence as parts. They acquire properties by virtue of being parts of a particular whole, properties they do not have in isolation or as parts of another whole” (2).

Moreover, the use of poison by the Igbo warriors annuls labour because it takes the play away from a Marxist text to a world of idealism. It also robs the Ife people the consciousness to fight back their foes.

### 3.4 Limitations in *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*

#### Structural Analysis:

This play is a loose adaptation of *The Inspector General* by Nikolai Gogol. In *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* Femi Osofisan employs humour to paint a scathing picture of municipal corruption in Nigeria. The play has a distinctively Nigerian quality of humour through the creation by the playwright, of dreamlike characters that are uniquely caricatured in Nigerian mannerisms. He stripes the characters from Gogol's model of their Russian peculiarities and re-costumes them in essentially Nigerian costumes. The dialogues in the play also reveal the moral universe of the characters which accurately depicts the usual bickering that goes on among irresponsible Nigerian government officials when they are supposed to be discussing serious national issues. The manner of name-calling and boasting which are typical among Nigerian office holders is portrayed in the play. In their desperation to acquire unmerited wealth, they engage in name-calling in order to maneuver and outwit each others for their selfish ends. In the play, the insignificant rogue, Isola, who has jumped bail in Lagos, is mistaken for Solarin, a government appointed Public Complaints Commissioner whose arrival is expected with panic by the corrupt local council officials. Isola is bribed and feted and finally betrothed to the daughter of a materialistic, corrupt Christian pastor who wears charms around his waist. After he has left with his pocket full of money, the mistake is discovered and the arrival of the real Public Complaints Commissioner is announced.

### **Contextual Analysis:**

In *Who's Afraid of Solarin,?* we are confronted with characters of the same social stratum, the councilmen who engage in accusation and counter-accusations of each other for the atrocities they committed while in office. The text therefore, contradicts pure Marxist play where conflict is usually waged between two opposing social classes – the dominant and the toiling classes. There is nothing in the play that shows the toiling class and what they are agitating for, except for the two beggars (Lamidi and Lemomu) whose missions are unclear. The implication here is that there is no clear demarcation between the dominant and the working class as demanded by Marxist doctrine. This renders the text intra-class as there is no character(s) that can be appropriately classified as the toiling class in the play.

The Ifa priest (Baba Fawomi) and the pastor (Nebuchadnezzah Ifagbemi) both of who compromised and traded off their sanctified offices to commercial and materialistic intents, undermine the spirit of labour both physically and spiritually. Instead of working for the good of all, they have resorted to private but selfish enterprises, thereby, rendering the text toward religious sentiment which is against the spirit of Marxism that sought to free the working class from religious slavery. For Marx, religious sentiment diminishes the materialist conception of history. People should work hard to earn wages through productive labour, instead of indulging in free and fraudulent means to earn wages. This impels Paul Savchenko to posit that, “labour is man’s purposeful activity through which he adapts natural objects and uses them to satisfy his needs. In any labour

process, man expends his physical, nervous and mental energy. Labour results in the emergence of useful pursuits” (10). This is exemplified in the character of Baba Fawomi who tries to hoodwink and deceive the pastor to rip him off the stolen church fund, thus:

**BABA FAWOMI:** Well! I hope you realize this exercise is going to cost you a lot.

**PASTOR:** Any price, I told you (52).

By this act, the expropriator has become expropriated, as Baba Fawomi tries to hoodwink the pastor in order to get his own pound of flesh from the stolen church fund. The use of charm by Baba Fawomi (the Ifa priest) to divine for the pastor so that his crimes would not be probed by the Public Complaints Commissioner transports the play toward encouraging and promoting spiritual and subjective experience. This negates the spirit of labour and denies the pastor of his consciousness. This moves the text towards idealism which Marxism tries hard to replace.

There is the problem of misplaced identity in the play in the person of Isola, who in a twist of event feigned to be the Public Complaints Commission to deceive the councilmen. The use of such a character in the text subjects the play to ambiguity. This is because characters of tragedy and, indeed, Marxist plays are known individuals whose social classes are known. Thus, the protagonist and antagonist of tragedies, according to Saint Gbilekaa, are not lone individuals, who possess a harmatia that ultimately destroys them, but are individuals whose



pursuits, goals and aspiration are those of the social classes that they represent (33). Adolfo Sanchez Vazquez lent credence to the above assertion when he observes that, “in a revolutionary tragedy, we are on historical ground and the conflict is not waged among individuals and the community but among social classes or forces” (22). Unlike the robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers* and Moremi in *Morountodun*, these radical characters fought for the collective interest of their groups to achieve their purposes.

### **3.5 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

This research work subjects the plays of Femi Osofisan to critical examinations in order to determine the degree of Marxist spirit contain thereof. At the end of the enquiries, it was found that the plays: *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun* and *Who's Africa of Solarin?* are not complete Marxist tests because of the limitations inherent in them.

#### **3.5.1 *Once Upon Four Robbers:***

It was found that, dialogue in the text is intra-class because no character or group of characters can be designated as representative of the dominant class. The encounters in the play between the robbers and the market women, the traders customers and the soldiers clearly show that they all belong to the same class – the down trodden. The soldiers whose images in the play are created as pro-establishment is contradicted by their activities as guards and keeping watch over the market. The implication is that they are rather portrayed as toiling men. In a

true Marxist text, conflict is waged between two social forces; between a dominant and a toiling class.

It is noteworthy that in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, myth and history are subverted. However, Saint Ghilekaa believes that the playwright uses them as pegs to hang his ideological and political idiosyncrasy. The implication is that Osofisan abandons the mystical ways of achieving myth and concrete history in this play. The use of charm by the robbers to dispossess the market women of their wealth promotes spiritual and subjective experience. This also annuls labour on the part of the robbers as well as denies the market people of consciousness, for Marxism thrives on interrelationship between two opposing social forces. The historical world for Marx is the product of human industry or activity. Labour, therefore, demands that all that man needs is not provided by nature in ready made form but to work hard to satisfy his needs.

### **3.5.2 *Morountodun*:**

One of the major Marxist flaws in *Morountodun* is the attempt by the playwright to create a woman character or a heroine that is unable to accomplish the revolutionary aesthetics demanded of her as the chief protagonist in the play. Titubi was neither consistent nor persistent in her struggle to defend her people against the revolting peasant farmers. Her emotional state and subsequent renouncement of her bourgeois heritage robs her of the heroic character the playwright may have tended to achieve. A tragic character must be appropriate or

true to type, and should neither blow cold nor hot. Also, a tragedy deals with positive and active protagonist caught in sharp conflict with opposing forces. The tragic hero suffers greatly and goes to disaster in the midst of the struggle. To this end, A. B. C. Duruaku posits that, the dramatist does not contrive a denouement to save the hero or heroine from catastrophe or to save him/her from suffering (77).

*Morountodun* also portrays characters that vacillate as well as oscillate in their deeds and behaviours without being firm in their struggle. For instance, Titubi (Moremi) plans to join forces with the peasants, the Superintendent raises propaganda against the State while Isaac and Buraimoh decamped from the farmers struggle and aligned with the oppressor. Osofisan, according to his critics, believes in collectivity as a strong instrument to fight against the oppressor but the flirtation of his characters in the play undermine his Marxist ideal and labour struggle. Also the use of poison by the Igbo warriors robs the Ife people of consciousness. This negates labour struggle and moves the text away from Marxism to idealism. Marx condemns idealists for mystifying the world and taking people away from concrete history. He advocates the need to move from the world of idea championed by Hegel to that of experience. Moreover, use of poison is anti-labour, for labour is man's purposeful activity through which he adapts natural objects and uses them to satisfy his needs. In labour process, man expends his physical, nervous and mental energy.

### **3.5.3 *Who's Afraid of Solarin?:***

The major problem of the play is that the text is dominated by characters of the same social status – the dominant class comprising the Councilmen, the Public Complaints Commissioner, Isola (the impostor) and the Pastor. There is no evidence in the text, to show the oppressed or toiling class. This contradicts true Marxist play where there is a clear demarcation between two opposing forces – the oppressor and the oppressed.

The pastor's resort to the use of supernatural protection to cover his atrocious deeds through the divination of the Ifa priest, lend the text towards religious sentiment. This contradicts Marxist ideal which sought to free labour from religious slavery. The implication, therefore, is that religious sentiment diminishes the materialist conception of history. Marxism encourages the working class to work hard to earn wages through productive labour rather than through questionable means. Subsequently, the impersonation of Isola as the Public Complaints Commissioner in the play leaves the reader or the audience in limbo of what the playwright tends to achieve. This also creates character identity problem in the play and subjects the play to ambiguity.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS

#### 4.1 An Overview:

The plays of Femi Osofisan chosen for this study are *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1982), *Morountodun* (1982) and *Who is afraid of Solarin?* (1978). The plays are hereunder subjected to comparative analysis to highlight the degree of Marxist significations inherent in them. Of all the Nigerian literary scholars, Femi Osofisan and Bode Sowande count among those whose works have attracted critical discourse. The reason being that, their works came at a time when Marxist aesthetics ideology became a commonplace discourse in social, economic and political spheres worldwide. Like other scholars home and abroad, Osofisan and Sowande bought into this Marxist ideologue and recreated their dramaturgy in line with this blowing climate.

This new-found thematic marriage led to what Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu describes as “emergence of critical works on the playwrights that articulated their dramas as significant examples of revolutionary theatre” (12). However, this study seeks to investigate as well as question the degree of Marxist ideals in the plays under discourse.

#### 4.2 *Once Upon Four Robbers:*

In an attempt to create a revolutionary theatre, the playwright treated in the passing the more important issues of characterization, thematic metaphor and textual meaning of his intended goals. These shortcomings

are noticeable not only in *Once Upon Four Robbers* but also in *Morountodun* and *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the playwright created heroes whose psychic temperament to live above their revolutionary goals are questionable. This fear made Wole Soyinka to doubt if the playwright's protagonists would survive the confrontation with forces that exist within the dangerous area of transformation. For instance, the robbers in this play represented by Alhaja, Hasan, Angola and Major are representative of the deviants pauperized by the society while the market women represent the materialistic establishment who are corrupt, greedy and extravagant. Unfortunately, these robbers who engaged in indecent and criminal self-serving pursuits are portrayed as heroes out to carry a violent change from a corrupt and oppressive system. Though Muiyiwa P. Awodiya describes these robbers as "victims of abject penury forced into armed robbery by "scandalous affluence," "insidious corruption" and bureaucratic ineptitude, nonetheless, they themselves are carrying out the same dastardly act which they accused the establishment of. This seems like the old axiom of "kettle calling pot black."

The robbers' claim that hunger drives them into the crime is mockery because they are not the only sufferers of the exploitative and oppressive regime. Also their claim of innocence, according to Major that, "we are honest, we steal only from the rich," (21) is inexcusable because the rich also cry. Neither does this right their wrongs. This flimsy reason

is countered by their attempt to rob Aafa, the poor itinerant preacher of his possession. Aafa sees the robbers as people ruled by over-ambition, avarice and pride to earn a living despite their low education. Yet after their encounter with him and with a pledge not to rob again, they failed and subsequently attacked and robbed the entire market women who are both poor and rich.

The characters in *Once Upon Four Robbers* are not well delineated between the dominant and the toiling classes as is common in Marxist texts while dialogue is intra-class because there is no character or group of characters that can be rightly situated in the play as pro-establishment. For instance, the dialogues in the play are mainly between the market women and the robbers all of who ideally and implicitly belong to the same toiling class.

Both the robbers and the market women in the play have one ethnocentric focus - to escape from abject poverty in their society caused by insincere, nonchalant, wicket and corrupt leadership that has continually pauperized the poor while making the rich super-rich. Whereas the robbers accused the establishment represented by the market women of ostentatious lifestyle, yet the same robbers could not put to good economic use their loots neither did they use such loot to better the lives of the downtrodden in the society. They rather dreamed of ostentatious and spend-thrift jamboree as exemplified in the character of Major.

**MAJOR:** This is money! Money! A new life. No more scurrying in the smell of back streets. A house the size of a palace! The law, tamed with my bank account! And children! Listen, I am going to be a daddy! I'll own the main streets, six, no ... ten Mercedes, the neon lights, the supermarkets... (52).

The playwright also failed to achieve the Marxist temperament of the play by choosing radical characters (the robbers) that set out to destroy what they, abnatio, hoped to achieve in life. They pursued selfish and personal goals rather than collective actions which Marxist ideology recommends. To this end, some scholars argue that the heroes of Sowande and Osofisan are no saints or more patriotic than the forces they set out to confront.

Moreover, Osofisan in *Once Upon Four Robbers* “leaves us with no clear picture of whose side the future belongs. This is because as Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu submits, “the play is thematically obsessed and merely leaves us with characters tormented by the past, filled with violence, death and unfulfilled dreams” (85).

#### **4.3 *Morountodun:***

In *Morountodun*, Femi Osofisan endeavours to create a work after the Marxist ideology as propounded by Karl Marx. In such an attempt, however, *Morountodun* ran short of ideal Marxist aesthetics but expresses rather Marxist tendencies. Based on these tendencies, Dapo Adelugba viewed that, “Osofisan espouses Marxian doctrines, a doctrine inadequate



to classify him as a Marxist contrary to some critics who are unable to justify such description. He rather says that, Osofisan's work is proto-Marxian" (39). Niyi Osundare shares similar view with Adelugba when he describes Osofisan's plays as tendencies – not hard-and-fast or a clear-cut ideological stance... they contain tendencies that range from liberal through the radical to the revolutionary (26). Thematic obsession is one of the problems inherent in the works of Femi Osofisan including *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun* and *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* Such ambiguity, in the view of Tess Akaeke Onwueme, "connects multiplicity of meanings and forms that oscillate between old and new theatricalities, between liberal and radical ideologies, between retrogressive and progressive worldviews" (63).

Like *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun* also exhibits radical characters in the personages of Titubi and Marshal – characters according to Victor Ukaegbu who fail to transcend the culturally constructed patriarchal myths and stereotypes that locate them always on the margins of the society. Citing *Morountodun* as an exemplum, Ukaegbu faulted Osofisan of creating a woman character (Titubi) that is unable to rise above the human frailties she berates in others (184 – 5). The implication is that Titubi's action is debilitating and hardly enhances her revolutionary credentials.

Titubi's vision in *Morountodun* as a radical is clear right from the onset and her character could be interpreted both as later-day radical- iconoclast and the spoilt rich daughter of Alhaja Kabirat on the other hand. However, her encounter and sojourn with the farmers changed her worldview but not her motivations and ambition. Though she came out from the farmers' enclave a changed person, she nonetheless still retains her close affinity with her mother without abandoning her background. She is a strong-willed character despite the obstacles on her way from achieving her mission as a revolutionary radical as designed by the playwright. Her strong-willed character was also exhibited during her encounter with the Deputy Superintendent of Police as she fearlessly challenged him in strong terms.

**TITUBI:** I went, and I returned, triumphant. Like a legend. You didn't believe me, did you? (60).

Marshal is another character in *Morountodun* adorned by the playwright as a radical but failed to live up to this status but rather turned into a nuisance due to the deprivation that engulfed him. In the course of fighting to emancipate his imprisoned comrades and destabilize the government in power, he ended up trying to satisfy his personal ego through individualistic rather than collective pursuit. This egoistic tendency is detested by Marxist principle which sought collective struggle to achieve group instead of personal ambition. Marshal's confrontation with Baba, the old leader of the

farmers arose because Baba questioned his intrigues. He, therefore, dismisses Baba as a leader of words and not action and a village leader and not a battle leader (77). The implication of his action is that Marshal rather than Baba was felled by the government superior arms and died while Baba negotiated for settlement with the government.

Like the armed robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Marshal turns a collective struggle into a personal quest for self-serving needs. Thus, his image as a hero and a positive radical is undermined. It could thus, be concluded that his disposition towards the farmers' struggle is that of a man waging a personal war against the establishment that has pauperized him. In the same vein, the violence which he wages against the government and for which he died for, is the same crime he accuses the government of perpetuating.

#### **4.4 *Who's Afraid of Solarin?***

*Who is Afraid of Solarin?* is Femi Osofisan's adaptation of a Yoruba culture and Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General*. First the Yorubas defy some diseases because of the prevalence of epidemics in the land. Smallpox is particularly dreaded because of its death toll on human life which almost attained epidemic proportions at the time. To avoid the spread of this dreaded disease, the Yorubas invented Sopono, the god of smallpox who is supposed to be responsible for infecting people with the disease when not adequately appeased. Osofisan therefore, transferred the

fear which the Yorubas have for the disease to the person of Dr. Tai Solarin in his play, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* whom the corrupt councilors dread so much for his uprightness and incorruptibility.

*Secondly, Who's Afraid of Solarin?* is an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General*. Osofisan employs Gogolian humour to paint a scathing picture of the monumental corruption in Nigeria. The belief in Orunmila as the god of wisdom and protection who must be consulted by the people when they are in danger. The six councilors in the play are faced with the problem of accountability. They therefore sought the assistance of Baba Fawomi, the Ifa priest, to seek Orunmila's help to forestall the Public Complaints Commissioner, Tai Solarin from coming to their council. It is also to prevent the Public Complaints Commissioner from discovering their criminal activities.

Analytically and comparatively, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* unlike *Morountodun* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* present us with comic rather than radical characters in the person of Isola, Baba Fawomi, Pastor Nebuchadnezzah Ifagbemi, among others who compromised their various positions for selfish but commercial intents.

Baba Fawomi, the Ifa priest is satirized as a religious charlatan who pretends to have expert knowledge of the Ifa divination process when he says:

**BABA FAWOMI:** Hush, I say! I know everything. (winks). (He brings out his opele and starts a mock ritual of divination, chanting words that are not recognizably Ifa's. Three times he throws the seeds and shakes his head, sighing heavily, and three times the Chairman and his men, who have crowded round the priest, collapse in gestures of terror and despair). That is the final proof! And I beg you; please don't mention the question of professional fees yet, for I shall only be too happy to accept (18).

He also exploits the people's beliefs in Orunmila by swindling and defrauding them by asking the councilors to provide some food items in excess of what is needed to make sacrifices to Ifa. He said to the Councilors:

**BABA FAWOMI:** If says, considering the gravity of the matter, you will each bring five cows... ten goats of the home grown type, all black and fat... ten other goats of the brown variety... sixteen fowls, strong-limbed, home-raised chickens... seven bales of white sloth (22).

**CHAIRMAN:** (groaning) Is that all!

**BABA FAWOMI:** Yes, for the first part of the ceremony. The invocation. Then, for the ceremony proper, each of you will fetch seven bales of white cloth (23).

Pastor Nebuchadnezzah Ifagbemi is another character that compromised his position as a man of God to sought protection in the god of Orunmila. By this turn of event, the playwright creates a character that is inconsistent, corrupt and unable to accomplish his religious callings. This also ran short of the Marxist revolutionary aesthetics which he intends to achieve. Isola Oriebora ran short of a radical character become an imposter and a trickster. He hoodwinked the councilors by pretending to be the Public Complaints commissioner and used that opportunity to rip them off of their ill-gotten money instead of prosecuting them for their corruption in the council. This character's dubious attitudes run contrary to the Public Complaints Commissioner in the person of Tai Solarin who is believed to be upright and incorruptible. It is therefore ambiguous to fathom what the playwright intends to achieve by this twist.

The councilors filled with guilt of their corruption and embezzlement in the council rehearsed their plans on how to bribe the Commissioner not knowing that they are dealing with an imposter.

**COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION:** He'll be more amenable to private arrangements then. But with a whole army like this, nothing will be achieved. That's when he'll remember his public reputation and use it to kick us in the face.

**CHIEF MAGISTRATE:** Let's give it a try, JDG. We'll approach him one by one with our different envelopes – and we can agree on a

uniform sum – say, a contribution towards his traveling expenses and so forth.

**ISOLA:** There're beginning to come. All the better, if they arrive one by one... (To Cecelia) it would have been lovely for us to sit and digest together, but now official business is calling. You know my reputation: never mix business with pleasure...

Unlike *Once Upon Four Robbers and Morountodun*, there is no character in *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* with strong-willed and revolutionary intents. The play is bedeviled with characters filled with personal, selfish and commercial passions to enrich themselves. Instead of fighting a collective interest which is the major tenets of Marxism, they are engaged in person pursuits. The only radical character in the person of the real Public Complaints Commissioner (Dr. Tai Solarin) whom the corrupt councilors dread so much for uprightness and incorruptibility appeared at the end of play and nothing is heard of him. Therefore, that revolutionary temperament expected of this character to bring a drastic change in the council was completely lost or better be described as a mission impossible. The appearance of the Public Complaints Commissioner at this juncture, amounts to thematic obsession in the play and the audience is left in limbo of the playwright's intention. This creates character identity problem and subjects the play to serious ambiguity.

In *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* we are entertained with a materialistic pastor who not only betrothed her daughter for commercial gain but also wears charms around his waist to hoodwink and dupe his victims. In the same vein, the four robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers* are faced with the problem of how they will evade arrest during their robbery operations. Thus, they consulted Aafa, the muslim-cum-Ifa priest who help prepare magical power that enable them to rob without being apprehended.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### 5.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 5.1 Summary:

This research work is carried out to examine the works of Femi Osofisan to interrogate the limitation of the author's plays as Marxist template. The following plays: *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Moroutodun*, and *Who's Afraid of Solalrin?* were critically examined, to determine the degree of Marxist doctrines exhibited by the playwright. The research notes and affirms, unequivocally, that Osofisan is a pillar in the field of dramaturgy that can be described as many things in one – a playwright, a poet, an actor, and a director. The themes of his plays also include injustice and oppression, corruption, self-reliance and perseverance, determination, compassion, collaboration, blackism, revolution, among others.

The research also reveals that Femi Osofissan is without doubt, a Marxist but his Marxist ideology is limited to some degree contrary to some views of scholars who describe him as a consummate Marxist. Reasons being that apart from the band wagon effect on the part of the critics, difference, departure, and even superiority are often hurriedly read into his works, hence, the erroneous assumption that he is a thoroughgoing Marxist. As a dramatist of repute, his theory of aesthetics is sometimes not strictly adhered to in practice.

Another limitation of Osofisan's plays is that dialogue is intra-class rather than inter-class, thereby negating the notion of class struggle. Dialogue ought to be between two social forces or classes – the oppressed and the oppressor;

between a dominant class and a toiling class as exemplified in *Once upon Four Robbers* where the dialogue is between the market people and the robbers, all belonging to the same toiling class.

His plays convey a variety of interpretations to the audience, capable of provoking further discussion. There are presented by implication, indirection or inference, rather than by direct statements. He does not propose a clear-cut solution to the problems raised in his plays, the purpose being to provoke thought rather than to persuade the audience to adopt a specific prescription, or any plan of action. For instance, *The Chattering and the Song* is about revolt; and *Morountodun* is about social injustice.

In a Marxist play, the conflict is usually waged between a dominant class and the toiling class. This was not adhered to in some of Osofisan's plays like *Morountodun* and *Once upon Four Robbers* where there are no clear demarcation between the dominant class and the oppressed and the voiceless class or characters. Moreover, Osofisan usually depicts collective characterization in his plays or drama. It is, therefore, difficult to do a thorough analysis of his individual characters because of his style of writing which is Brechtian.

In *Morountodun*, for instance, myth and history are subverted. Here, Osofisan reconstructs the Moremi myth and legend of the past to suit his revolutionary view on the political forces of oppression, injustice and corruption in contemporary Nigeria. In the play, the Aristocratic Titubi, fancying herself a

modern-day Moremi and egged on by the government agent Salami, infiltrates the peasant's ranks as a spy. But after being exposed to the peasant's way of life and experiencing their suffering she, in a twist of fate, renounces her bourgeois heritage and becomes ideologically transformed to the farmers' cause. This negates the spirit of class struggle and Marxist doctrine.

These factors compels Dapo Adelugba to describe Femi Osofisan's works as proto-Marxian for the fact that, Osofisan espouses Marxist tendencies based on his adaptation of intertexts or borrowings from other writers, an act not adequate to classify him as a Marxist.

## **5.2 Conclusion:**

Marxist ideology, principles and practice and the extent to which Femi Osofisan adopts them in his dramaturgy, is the focus of this discourse. Marxism as we know it today predated Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) but he popularized and ennobled its practice. Marxism arose out of the need to wrestle power from the tyrannical and despotic hegemonies that has expropriated and appropriated the commonwealth of the people for their selfish ends.

From his days, Marx knew that there was an ongoing dialectical struggle between two different classes, whether it was the lord and serf in the feudal days, or capitalist and workers in his time. Each time the battle would lead to mutual destruction or a revolution in society. In Marx's days according to Andrew M. Butler, "workers were treated like cogs in machinery, to be exploited to make

money for capitalists, and thrown away when no longer needed” (47). The worker was alienated from his or her labour. The evils Marx saw, fought and died for in his days, not only still manifest today but have become commonplace. In many parts of the world, especially in the Third World countries, it is the same story of exploitation, corruption, embezzlement of public funds, injustice and oppression, insensitivity, extortions, mismanagement of public tilts, policy somersault, irregular and sometimes outright non-payment of salaries and pensions of retired workers who have served their countries meritoriously, among others. Marxism was, therefore, enthroned to give free reign to these suffering masses who have for long been emasculated and ramshackled by the power-brokers.

Like Marx, Femi Osofisan hopes for an egalitarian society. To this end, he believes that:

Everyman be born free and equal. That everyman has a right o life and to the means of maintaining it. That inequality, as we practice it in Nigeria, can only lead to doom. That change and progress can only be achieved by us and not through any divine intervention. That anybody who labours must enjoy the fruits of his labour. That nobody should exploit the labour of others for his personal enrichment (22).

Femi Osofisan is without doubt, a Marxist and a radical writer whose plays, according to Muyiwa P. Awodiya, “are revolutionary in that they propose radical

political alternatives for the present social orders and who uses literature as a weapon of social change” (25).

However, the point of departure for which this work seeks to interrogate is that, from the analysis of the plays: *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who’s Afraid of Solarin?*, the playwright fall short of and/or negate Marxist doctrine to certain degrees. This is in contra-distinction to the popular view that Femi Osofisan’s plays are complete Marxist ideology.

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