

THEATRE OF REVOLT: THE ROLE OF INSURGENT WOMEN IN
FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS* AND
MOROUNTODUN

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Abstract

The issue of radical women in radical drama as presented by radical male or female dramatists is fast becoming a phenomenon in modern Nigerian Theatre. The emergence of the woman and her role has continued to remain superficial and contentious. In other words, the challenges of projecting female characters in a vantage position over their male counterparts has been very daunting owing to the indigenous cultural beliefs of the African origin. Indeed, in the ancient Greek era they (women) were completely omitted from role playing in drama. Thus, the role of "agenda-setting" through drama is purely seen from the point of view of a male dominated society. In fact, history has shown that most dramatists actually reduced or dislodged the force and value of female characters in their drama. Thus the issue of national development for instance has been mostly handled with patriarchal and sexist prejudices towards the female gender. The aim of this paper however is not to castigate the male gender or to advocate for the mortgage of their rights. Rather it seeks to re-define and re-negotiate the character of the male-chauvinist in Nigerian drama today in relation to that of their female counterparts. It also strives to re-discover factors that necessitated the emergence of 'a theatre of revolt' and at the same time debunk a phantom vision created by archaic concepts about women in drama. In concentrating on the insurgent role of women in modern Nigerian dramaturgy therefore, we attempt to project the concept of the women's place in Nigerian drama from a highly contributive, functional and positive angle. The two plays' Once Upon Four Robbers and Morountodun by

Osofisan have been used to buttress the point. The plays also reveals the Marxist and radical ideological learning's used to unfold the situation of women in these plays.

Introduction

The idea of revolt although not alien to the Nigerian theatre, is part of the radical aspect of theatre, prominent in dramas of ideology highlighting feminist, Marxist as well as other socio-political ideologies. Tobrise (106)

In simple terms, revolt here bothers on the conflict between the two sexes and the existing ideological battle against certain social restrictions by the virtuous amongst the female gender. One discovers that; "it is easy and convenient to discuss the issue of the image of women in Nigerian literature as an old cliché; and much argued over and therefore irrelevant. Yet, to the discerning mind, it is obvious that these arguments have covered similar grounds and usually hinge on male assertion of superiority to counter female stridency in asserting their newly realized equality/superiority." Inyang (225) Be that as it may, we do not seek to castrate the men, but rather to explore without bias recrimination, the quintessence of women particularly as they appear in drama.

It is in this light that we sought to move beyond simplistic generalizations to explore certain basic female stereotypes which recur in Nigerian drama. It is not a case of trying to personalize the issue of female subsistence, rather one which articulates the wishes and aspirations of the female gender to attain equal opportunity with the male. It is also to revitalize the old situation through debunking that which over the years have portrayed the women folks as second fiddles in the society. Even though we tend to say that our ancient parent (male) relegated the position of the women folk to the background, but a new drama is required to replace the old unserviceable past.

By and large one sees Nigeria as a male dominated society. An example of this cultural aspect is the national anthem, which unequivocally calls on *compatriots* to serve their *fatherland* in the tradition of the past *heroes*. Even Nigerian literature/drama is purely dominated by male writers and male critics; hence their attention is focused on male characters and consequently targeted towards a male oriented audience. However the need to revise this thought appears imminent as “feminism has begun to re-examine and where necessary rewrite our political and cultural history.” Stubbs (xvii) The achievement of this is however done through the creative portrayal of insurgent women (characters) in recent Nigerian drama. This awareness is created by playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Bode Sowande, Ola Rotimi, Bode Osanyin, Kole Omotosho, Stella Oyedepo, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Foluke Ogunleye, Julie Okoh, Bunmi Julius-Adeoye, Iyorwuese Hagher etc and a host of others. This is true because, a brief exposition of the women preoccupations in the past reveals that they have not received enough attention in the dramatic genre. In fact, in the classical age they were initially exempted from playing roles or appearing on stage. This is because some socio-cultural phenomena had largely inhibited classical women from realizing their potentials. However in recent times, the reverse is the case as they have become strong and protesting vehemently to have a fair participation in nation building.

It is against this backdrop that we begin to see playwrights like Osofisan whose dramatic vision protects and projects the female gender in his artistic preoccupation as relevant agent in the development of a society. Indeed his plays are known for the dominance of heroines. They range from the material, dominating, the docile, to the insurgent. He sees the need to wield human forces-male and female to an effective whole. Perhaps this spurs the need for a theatre of revolt, a theatre of change, of coercion,

particularly through conscientisation of the society using strong female characters to under score the point.

As a Marxist aesthetician Osofisan departs from the protest theatres of Ogunde and Soyinka to a more functional one. Though the Moremi legend for instance, he seeks to conscientize his audience with what ability, strength and heroine qualities, can be exuded through a woman. He strives to bring about awareness aimed towards a change of attitude in order to restore primordial sanity. Indeed, the intention is to transform old traditions in such a way that would attract meanings in present times. It is a situation of presenting a people as 'renewed' i.e. assuming a new role and a new image of togetherness (co-existence).

In the same vein, Tess Onwueme in *Go Tell It To The Woman* displays as underlying philosophy of co-existence amongst gender. She also reveals in *A Hen Too Soon* the in dignifying relationship between parent and the female child. Gladys the heroine is confronted with harsh conditions to marrying an old man, chief Oboli against her wish and at the expense of her educational pursuit.

A display of this attitude also manifests in Efua Sutherland's, *The Marriage of Anansewa*, where a case of total greed, a case where the hero preferred material acquisition at the expense of his daughter, Anansewa. Also, in Bakare's *Once upon a Tower*; Senator Abdul Rahamon Ikeanobi the House committee chairman on education at the Senate compellingly wants to use his only daughter, Khadijat as a conduit pipe through which money will be siphoned from an uneducated old friend of his-Chief Ogbuefi Alexandra Chukwuma. This self-seeking maneuver if succeeded will make Khadijat, Chief Ogbuefi's third wife, thereby protecting him (Senator Abdul) politically and security wise.

Thus, the wheels of an emerging "revolting theatre", particularly that of ideology as exhibited by insurgent women is predicated on

the patriarchal society they found themselves. From the view point of Osofisan and other modern dramatist, the Onus to expose the fact why the female character be emphatically portrayed as one who has qualitative leadership qualities becomes imminent. They see the emerging women in their literary endeavours as already in the centre-piece of change. She revolts vehemently against social restrictions which impede the development of the commonly named “second sex”.

Osofisan’s Dramatic Vision

As a second generation playwright, his works deals urgently with “contemporary social problems in Nigeria with the aim of raising awareness of a positive revolutionary alternative to the present decadence” Obafemi (168). Osofisan emphasized the class relationship between the oppressed and the oppressors’ hence his dialectics focuses strongly on the predicaments of the deprived lot in a class-structural society such as Nigeria.

Osofisan sees drama as a social and ideological weapon which could be used to bring about socialist ideals rather than dwelling on the existing capitalist hegemony. This preposition is clearly reflected in his plays where we encounter the deplorable condition of the working masses and the ostentation living habits of the so-called bourgeoisie (Capitalist) class.

In fact, the recurrent theme expressed in Osofisan’s theatre is “the egalitarian socio-political restructuring of society where there will be equal opportunities for all.” Gbilekaa, (76). As a contemporary playwright he exposes these societal ills as well as striving to conscientize the masses towards a dynamic change of attitudes. His theatrical idioms are therefore anchored on the revolutionary potentials of the proletariat and how they can re-direct their course towards achieving a socialist society. The approach appears to be a true manifestation of the industrial age with its socio-economic by-

product of the class-struggle inter-locking the capitalist and the proletariat. This theatre unearths problems as topical as the phenomenon of unemployment, crime, inequality, hunger, gender, discrimination, class-struggle, corruption etc.

It is along these lines that Osofisan exploits the dramatic potentials of “magic elements of myth, folktale, dance and music through a dialectical and revolutionary treatment.” Obafemi (182). Albeit these appear to be ancient forms, he simply employs them in order to unmask their hidden meanings. Through his theatricalities he undermines the magic of superstition. In fact, he reject out rightly the religious content of myth and of the gods which to him makes economic exploitation possible. Therefore, from a dialectical materialistic point of view it becomes clear that his theatre is intertwined with the Brechtain concept which portrayed theatre as a place for intellectual discourse rather than as an escapist tool. Such an idyllic vision lay emphasis more on the presentational style through which anti-illutional techniques like songs, narrative passages, direct interaction with the audience, film sequences, posters, “play-within-the-play” and so on. Indeed, characters are presented in a manner that would provoke emotional evocativeness. In line with the Brechtain theory he “de-emphasis’s plot, discourages emotional identification through the use of songs and highly ironic tone and ends with a frankly continued antirealistic resolution.” Cameron and Hoffmon (997:103).

Osofisan’s plays invariably do not follow a logical sequence of the plots; this is basically to create a detachment from the audience on the performance on stage. Besides, he is anti-Aristotelian, hence his protagnrist emerges from the underprivileged (proletariat) rather than the noble class (bourgeoise). It would also be pertinent to note that, most times the conflicts are deliberately left unresolved in order to provoke ‘opinion poll’ from members of the society.

This technique is carefully captured in *Once Upon Four Robbers* where a dialogue ensues between an actor and the audience thus; Aafa: The Robbers and the soldiers' Who are acting on your behalf? So you have got to decide and resolve the issue. Which shall it be? Who wins? Yes Madam? Your reasons please?

This reveals vividly the dialectical relationship between theatre and society. The questions above are meant for the society who is expected to evolve a resolution on these issues in order to chart a way forward.

Thus, as a playwright who has shown himself self-consciously aware of the problems militating against society, he strive to interpret and reinterpret historical, political, sociological, economic as well as the cultural issues of his time with the view to striking a positive deal for mankind and his psyche.

The Concept of Female Insurgency in Nigerian Drama

It was the Human Rights Watch Organization in its 2001 report which indicted the Nigerian nation on the low participation of Nigerian women in national politics and social decision making. Citing the report, Olaitan and Omobolanle, (180) observes that; Women throughout the world face systematic attacks on human rights and chronic, routine and legal discrimination and violence, much of it is justified through cultural and religious arguments. Even where discrimination is prohibited, it measure, state failure to uphold women's rights as full and equal citizens sends and an unmistakably clear message to the broader community that women's lives matter less, and that violence and discrimination against them is acceptable

The peculiar predicaments which has over the years classify African literature, drama inclusive as 'male-created, male-oriented and indeed a chauvinistic art', is by no means thought provoking in contemporary times. "Why can't women be major characters in the frontiers of revolutionary consciousness? Why can't we "celebrate their physical and intellectual capabilities, and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of the role." Aidoo (16). A role expected to be played by both sexes. In other words, the realization of this ideological commitment to the struggles has to be total and collective. Gbilekaa (21) proves further that;

Revolution has to be collective. If any man believes he can do it alone he is fooling himself. The forces that he is fighting are enormous... Let us start from history, none of the revolutionaries worked alone.

In simple terms, revolt here bothers on the existing conflict between the two sexes and the high degree of ideological awareness that has been created already in the society.

This awareness has been created to heighten the growth of radical approaches coupled with definite ideological leanings in drama. Thus theatre has moved from the kind of protest theatre of Ogunde, J.P. Clark, Ene Henshaw and to an extent, Soyinka for lack of a clear cut dialectical thrust to a more functional one whose aesthetics is predicated on the treatment of contemporary and radical issues.

The nature and function of this theatre is dependent on social relations which are defined by economic forces. Hence Osofisan dramatizes the lopsidedness of the society in order to effect a change for equitable re-allocation of the benefits of production. It becomes clear that there has been "a new shift in aesthetic paradigm where the preoccupation of the new radical playwrights should in their works manifest all signs of ideological consciousness

that would encourage and valourise motherhood as well as seek a rediscovery, a redefinition and cooperation among the two genders.” Gbilekaa, (3) Osofisan displays an ideology which is materialist in description and perception and dialectical in approach. In the same vein, Dauda, (42) believes that “Osofisan saw in Moremi, the qualities the women needed for a particular situation they are in. He uses the Agbekoya uprising, to transcend the ideological hoax of the Moremi myth.” This is however in line with recent trend in drama which is imbued with the consciousness that project and recognize the aspirations of the oppressed male and female in today’s society. Committed playwrights have focused their attention with the view of tracing the cause of the dehumanizing conditions of hunger, poverty, insecurity, joblessness and of course the hemlining of women.

It is pertinent to note that, while the first generation playwrights concentrated on cultural re-awakening and national unity; the second generation hinged their creativity on profound class and social issues. Their intension is to arouse positive revolutionary alternatives to the present social malaise. A ready example is seen in the armed robbery phenomenon in Osofisan’s *Once Upon Four Robbers*; The powerlessness of women in the face of strong male dominance in Irene Salami’s *More than Dancing* and *The Queen Sisters*’ legitimizing female political involvement in national and global affairs in Hagher’s *Mulkin Mata*; The rise against male hegemony and dominant patriarchal ideologies in Tess Onwueme’s *The Broken Calabash* and *The Reign of Wazobia*; The league of insurgent women in Stella Oyedepo’s *The Revolt of the Bumpy-Chested*. “The view point of these female heroines is simply centred on vitriolic criticisms of the social order, as well as stressing and affirming their existence through metaphors and images of power resistance and revolt against male domination”. Tobrise, (11).

These idyllic visions as captured in these plays no doubt presuppose a complete re-structuring of the human mind and his/her entire thinking process. It is a vision that is expected to inspire revolutionary consciousness required for re-assessing our value mechanism as a people. Indeed, this approach which embraces the socialist ideals is what has given birth to an insurgent theatre with regards to woman in drama. Inspired probably by the theoretical construct of feminism worldwide, Nigerian male and female writers are beginning to change the literary canons and traditions that are reluctant to championing the aspirations of the female gender. Their effort therefore seems to be geared towards a drama of demystification and total liberation from the classical profundities of the first generation playwrights. For examples, Osofisan in *No More The Wasted Breed* differed ideologically from Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*, and even so, from J.P. Clarks *The Raft* with his (Osofisan's) *Another Raft*. We also, see that Sofola's *The Sweet Trap* has much relevance in contemporary society, where issues of women aspirations are distinctively articulated. Obuh (29) confirms that, "the play thus dramatically explores the problems being experienced in modern society where the woman demands her right at all costs in a traditionally male dominated society."

This is an unequivocal manifesto that illustrates the inevitability of socio-cultural and even political change in our society. In Sofola's play, this is displayed by Mrs Clara Sotubo who is ready to defy her husband in order to achieve her freedom and maintain the societal values of a woman. Indeed, characters in most of these plays advocate for an overthrow of corruption and the decadent status-quo. Another strong statement is captured in Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives have Gone Mad Again* where the women like Chief (Mrs) Irene Okpiribe, Ene Abah, Mairo Bello and others put on display 'role-switching' with their male counterpart in order to portray the domestic exploitation that has been the bane in the society. It is against this backdrop that Ezenwa-Ohaeto reiterates

this in the Preface of the play that; “the writer uses this play to comment on the act of domestic and matrimonial exploitation that turn spouses in real life into unremunerated workers in the home.” (Preface to *Our Wives have Gone Mad Again*)

It is against this backdrop that Iji, (92) asserts that: Osofisan’s feat in *Morountodun* has been to establish a class consciousness base for indigenous mass revolution against our multifaceted socio-political injustices. It is no doubt a truth-conscious question.... Her success was really to perpetuate the injustices of the powerful against the weak and the exploited.

Conversely, Obafemi (1987) categorized Osofisan as belonging to a group that is devoted to creating an alternative social system, a socialist alternative through drama. This is a clear attempt to create characters whether male or female that can incite and excite the peasants towards self-improvement, protest and revolution. On the contrary, the sexist discrimination in plays like *Edufa* by Ama Ata Aidoo; *The Marriage of Anansewa* by Efua Sutherland; *Altine’s Wrath* by Femi Osofisan; *The Wives Revolt* by J.P. Clark; *The Broken Calabash* by Tess Onwueme, *Olamma* by Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh and a host of others have not daunted the steady growth of radical consciousness amongst contemporary writers who are poised towards projecting the female agenda or at least placing the female characters in their works side by side their male counterparts.

Evaluating these ideological plays and the role of these female dramatists as they oppose male hegemony in society through their plays therefore, Ekwierhoma (16) maintains that; “the female characters play major roles and even where the roles are minor, their negligible positions may become positively active in a way as to make them contribute to the progress of their people.” This conceptual construct by these self-conscious writers have brought to lime light the capabilities of female characters and their

urge to acquire a literary position that will not be one-sex dominated, rather, one that will reflect the two different view points of gender per se on human existence. Indeed, the conceptualizations of this existing ideological battle against certain social restrictions by the virtuous amongst the female writers appear to be expanding and unshakable.

A textual description and thematic exegesis of *Once Upon Four Robbers*

The play deals with the problems of armed robbery in Nigeria. The play reveals the problems of unemployment, housing, hunger, and worship for money, unequal distribution of the nation's wealth and above all corruption and injustice in high places.

The play opens in the market place with the soldiers tying a prisoner (Alhaja's husband) to a stake and executing him before the eyes of the masses who cared to be there. The Foursome, Major, Angola, Hassan and Alhaja took this public execution of their leader as a challenge to carry out a revenge on society in order to achieve some dignity for themselves.

Hear the dialogue that ensued among them;

Angola: I know the Sergeant.

His wife sells at that stall over there.

It wouldn't be difficult to get him. p.3.

However, Major prefers to call it quits with the profession (robbery) based on the present event that has befallen them.

Major: lets go now Alhaja. I'll see you home.

Angola: The morning's rising

Hassan:Let it rise. We've got a wound to avenge.

Major: No, not any more

Hassan:We are left. We'll fight them.

Major: Till the last man! Well, good luck to you. I am off. I want to live. (p3).

The playwright has been able to establish that even within the oppressed; there exist criminals, who are weaklings, who may not be able to withstand the test of harsh times. Hence Angola reveals that, often Major broke down and sobbed like a school boy anytime they embarked on a raid. He also reveals that their lives are meaningless to them if they did not fight to better them. They were born in slums and fed on worms and left-overs and yet Major still wanted to leave. To Hassan and Angola, their bodies are mere corpses amongst others in the government mortuary. The playwrights' motive in this argument is to point out clearly what it takes to fight and correct an unjust society—steadfast, courage and determination.

Hassan believe strongly that the four of them could still create some impact, after all, it is only the bar beach and six feet below the ground that is left for them. He does not see the need for retreat or surrender. He says; 'we are left, we'll fight them'.

As the play unfolds, Hassan proves to Major that their life, as robbers is not longer, important. They are worthless and cheap according to the government decree.

Hassan: You trade in death and danger; by government decree your life's the cheapest commodity in the market...

Here the robbers are obviously aware of doomsday; hence they are not ready to relent in their struggle for survival. We see Hassan expressing the need for solidarity even with the female gender as he reminds the other robbers to listen to Alhaja. He says; Hassan... Listen to Alhaja! There'll be nothing after us, you hear, nothing but the empty stalls and their solidarity of sufferings, the blood stains. (p.50).

This reveals to a large extent the spirit of togetherness and co-existence between the two sexes even though the motif is a treacherous one. Indeed, the strength of this female robber is revealed further in the play as she infiltrates the minds of the soldiers who were constructing another stand for the execution of Major. Her interaction with the soldiers brings them (Soldiers) out of oblivion. She, through crafty means reveals to the soldiers that they are being used by the bourgeoisie class to perpetrate their selfish intentions which is normally targeted on the masses which the soldiers also belong. In this regard she brain-washes the soldier into believing that Major is innocent of the crime levied against him. She says to the soldiers'. Hear her;

Alhaja: You know they are always using the poor against the poor. This boy now, is just like you, poor, and underlying. So they get you to shoot him and nobody will ever support him. (p46).

Alhaja pulls through with this as the soldiers later had a rethink and rather employ a surreptitious way of releasing him from jail.

It is however clear that Osofisan condemns the bar beach slaughter of robber because to him it would not bring about the purported sanity that the country crave for. He sees the robbery phenomenon as one that has continued to characterize the big cities in Nigeria till date. He uses this medium therefore to suggest to government to rather examine the inequality that has perverted our society today.

A textual description and thematic exegesis of *Morountodun*

Osofisan's *Morountodun* attempts to bring the peasants and their oppressors into a drama of struggle, of victory, of war, of betrayal and hope. It was a revolt of the peasant farmers against the neo colonialist elitist class.

The play opens in retrospect exhibition of the Moremi legend and the Agbakoya uprising in the west where an itinerant theatre group

within the play decides to re-enact the farmers' revolt which took place in the old western region of Nigeria. *Morountodun* is a play text therefore that up dates the ancient myth of Moremi the Ife queen who infiltrate the enemy camp in order to unravel the mysteries surrounding the insistent defeat of her people. It is therefore a recreation of ancient mythology geared towards redressing the contemporary political structure. This recreation which is centered on the peasants' revolt is however stopped by the young beautiful Titubi, daughter of Alhaja Kabirat who comes into the theatre unannounced. But the prompt arrival of the police makes her see reason why she should devote her wealth, beauty and courage to serving the state.

Titubi thereafter surrenders herself by impersonating and parading as one of the protesting villagers. This was merely a play to enable her infiltrate their ranks and recover useful information for the government. Her responsibility here was simply to reveal useful information that would lead to the capture of the peasant leader in two weeks. In line with this gimmick of creating an opportunity for the government to kill the revolt Titubi was arrested and taken to prison.

By this feat, it signifies that Titubi with her rich background has committed class suicide. She eventually became resolute in her new identity and insisted in remaining in prison in order to achieve her desire. Indeed, she sees herself transformed into the legendary Moremi figure in Yoruba Mythology. Hear her;

Titubi... Now, when I wear this necklace, I feel a passion deeper than any passing vogue. It is as if I have become history itself.
(P12.)

It becomes pertinent to note here that Titubi suddenly become resolve, courageous, determined and displayed a lot of bravery. She

prefers to risk her life murdered in order to value it. Hence she vows never to change her mind towards the struggle. She promises to be the clay with which the entire race requires to mold itself.

The play which has a Yoruba setting with its locate in the west is merely an enactment of what happened in September 1969 when the Nigerian Civil War was still raging in the Eastern part of the country. Here, Osofisan is concerned with the War which took place in the west. It was a war that brought the peasant farmers face to face with the state, the oppressed and oppressors in conflict. It was popularly known as the 'Agbekoya' uprising. These peasants challenged the decadence and bestiality in governance which included corruption, bribery oppression, intimidation, exploitation, dictatorship etc. In this regards we encounter the themes of confrontation of war, sabotage and betrayal, women's courage and revolt, endurance and determination all geared towards the reformation of a socialist model of society as well as a total dismantling of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie. All these are evidence in the play.

In trying to fulfill these lofty objectives we experience a playwright who not only denounces the seeming efficacy of the gods but demystifying them as well. He (Osofisan) believes that the gods have been perpetually ineffective hence the peoples plights have continuously remained unabated in spite of the sumptuous sacrifices heaped on them (gods) He sees the menace of the Igbo warriors on the Ile-Ife people which has refused to be suppressed in spite of the abundant rituals and sacrifices to the gods as a perfect example.

It is against this background that Moremi threatened to depart from reverencing the gods. Listen to her;

Moremi: No, No! Nini, it is time for/us to rise to stand and/square up our shoulders by/our own courage, and stop/leaning on the gods. (P.13)

In the same spirit of change we see in Titubi a new creature, a totally transformed person in her new role among the peasant farmers. Indeed her commitment, dedication and revolutionary posture even created some doubt between Baba and Marshal on her true identity. We hear Baba commending her that 'there were nights she didn't sleep at all, nursing the wounded! They were all astonished when volunteered to accompany the children and women in their evacuation to the cities.

It is clear that the play revolves around Titubi-the heroine and her insurgent posture geared towards the freedom and liberation of her people. Through a process of empathization, acculturation and suffering she is poised to bear the destiny of the Ile-Ife people in her hands. In other words, her eventual re-birth and renunciation from a wealthy middle class background to identifying and situating herself within the realm of the peasant class stands her out as a vanguard of the oppressed masses. In fact she accepts her role even if she needs to exchange it for her life. As a radical with a cause she courageously makes herself comfortable among the war-lords like Marshal. She hands a gun over to him saying;" take, the gun.... Let a new life begin (p.15). Yes. No greater love can a man have than that he should die to save his friend. Her heroic characteristics exudes a new attitude and is highly appreciated by Marshal who sees a positive deal in a women hence he bestows her with new ornaments. He says:

I give her not a gun, nor is matchet, but costly beads of Iyun. For her war is not to kill, buy to heal... Therefore I pluck her name like this, all ripe and golden, not from the laden shelf of our violent heroes but from the store house of beauty and tenderness. I name her Morountodun. (P.17)

It becomes clear that it is in collaboration with Titubi therefore, that Marshal reveals to Baba their next line of attack on the government.

Similarly, in that spirit of struggle, we encounter other women like Mama Kayode discussing the affairs of the state and the genesis of their hardship, exploitation and oppression. These women including Wura, Molade, Mosun all saw the revolt as a reasonable vehicle of changing the society and creating a better life for them. Even Alhaja Kabirat with her bourgeoisie background is not left out as we see her grievously lamenting the deplorable prison condition in Nigeria when she visited her daughter in prison. There is an indication here that she has not abandoned her daughter and her revolutionary tendencies. This also reveals the playwrights Marxist leanings which is geared towards collective action of the people irrespective of their status or gender. We also witness the collective trial of Alhaja Buraimoh and Lawyer Isaac which was aimed at exposing the contradictions that characterizes societal activities particularly between the male and female gender.

Through the 'Agbekoya' rebellion, Osofisan has however emphasized a collective agenda of togetherness which should transcend gender boundaries. This re-enactment therefore exposes the potentials of the contemporary Nigerian peasants, female inclusive to effect change, and a positive one at that.

Conclusion

The contemporary Nigerian theatre and the insurgent roles of female characters are obviously predicated on a theatre of conscientization and change. In recent times, the emerging woman rather than remain docile, passive, mere brood mares has decided to plunge further into the frontiers of total participation. It is the kind of participation that would achieve measurable targets of enhancing gender equality and women empowerment. With the

increase in the level of education and certificated women in our society today, Hameed, (132) reiterates that: “in governance, female activists have advocated for more participation of women in politics and economic activities for empowerment against domination by men.” This league of insurgent women and their roles in recent Nigerian drama indicates the gradual breakdown of the deep cultural belief and perception that had characterized the female gender of old.

This is a clear assertion of the fallout of the 1995 Beijing platform for action (BPfA) which appears to have rekindled a new form of revolt and activism on women all over the world. Even still, recent dramatists are beginning to theatrically key into the thirty five percent affirmative action of the *Transformation Agenda* as most characters in their drama(s) strive to participate in political, social, economic wealth creation opportunities for women.

Inspired probably by the theoretical construct of feminism, the insurgent thrust of theatre in Nigeria which boost of both male and female dramatist like Femi Osofisan, Bode Osanyin, Zulu Sofola, J.P. Clark Bekederemo, Tess Onwueme, Stella Oyedepo, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Irene Salami-Agunloye have obviously experienced an upward surge.

Thus, the negative portrayal of women as witches, prostitutes, gold-diggers, parasites, temptresses seems to have witnessed a reversal as Osofisan strives to portray them (women) as positive heroines capable of contributing significantly to societal growth. Characters like Zulu Sofola’s Ogwoma in *Wedlock of the gods*; Tess Onwueme’s Wazobia in the *Reign of Wazobia*; Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh’s Neora in *Neora: An African Dolls House*; Osofisan’s Ibidun in *Red is the Freedom Road*; Yajin and Funtola in *The Chattering and the Song*; Alhaja in *Once Upon Four Robbers*; Titubi in *Morountodun*; Olabisi in *Farewell to A cannibal Rage*. To

Onwueme (118) these female Characters are “independent, forceful, enlightened and socially conscious” (118).

It becomes clear that Femi Osofisan's Philosophical stance is aimed at transforming, exposing and empowering the female gender towards certain challenges. Indeed, just like trying to bridge the gap between bourgeoisie and the proletariat, Osofisan tries to have us experience a co-existence between the two sexes in terms of role playing necessary for societal development.

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