

## Political Order and Revolutionary Vision in Select Plays of Femi Osofisan and Effiong Johnson

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### Abstract

*The select plays of Femi Osofisan, namely The Oriki of a Grasshopper (1986) and Fires Burn and Die Hard (1989), and Effiong Johnson's The Fight Has Just Begun (2000), and Not without Bones (2000), set aside for critical examination in this paper, characteristically delineate the complicated socio-cultural trajectory of postcolonial state condition. The day-to-day encounters of the mass of society, and the difficult landscape of political and moral corruption, social upheavals, with the recurrent contradictions of widespread poverty in the midst of plenty, worsening state of underdevelopment and disorderly live of society as captured in these plays, converge to drag Nigerian nationhood behind in the comity of fast progressing nations of the world. In the listed plays, corruption, oppression and leadership failure put the people in dire straight, to the extent that the playwrights are compelled to push for revolutionary change. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the strategies by which the two playwrights use their artistry as veritable tool to chart the roadmaps to revolutionary transformation of society. These texts thus embody the daily realities that confront society and the quest for reconstruction and regeneration of a better world. The conclusion of this paper is that through creative activism and well-articulated developmental vision, the two playwrights represent in their texts and performances, the way forward towards realizing a more inclusive and a better world order.*

**Key words:** Femi Osofisan, Effiong Johnson, revolutionary vision, dramatic art, postcolonial state

### Introduction.

In postcolonial African literary experience, dramatic art and playwriting, like the other major genres, continue to serve the social function of mobilizing for society's transformation and moral regeneration that are prerequisite to sustainable growth, meaningful development and for better living standard of society. This enduring interest by African writers, dramatists and playwrights inclusive, stems from the conditions of

postcolonial/postmodern African states, which of course, are tied to the experience of colonization and post-independence confusion with the woes and turmoil bequeathed by the imperialist dominators, exploiters and their indigenous surrogates on the liberated societies. The African writer or literary artist is conscious of the environment that he or she is rooted, the humiliation of the historical past, and the contradictions of the present and the hope for the future. Hama Tuma rightly asserts that “colonialism wrecked Africa and was/is mainly responsible for the pitiful state it finds itself in at the present time” (1). A peep through the geopolitical spread of the entire African continent unfolds an array of beleaguered, fragmented, poor and famished societies where leaders find pleasure in cornering the commonwealth, ruling their people with iron fists, while shamelessly presiding over societies that are handled as their private estates. This is what colonialism bequeathed African societies and the situation of the past has left lasting repercussions on the present experience.

Committed African creative writers in every genre of the arts, and literary scholars are saddled with the task of bringing their creative and intellectual ingenuity to bear on the crises and complications of cultural clash and distorted values that emanated in the processes of colonial encounter and neo-colonialism, with the intent of mediating this experience in specific intellectual ways. Ahmed Yerima, following in the thought of Homi Bhabha, points out that the repercussion of the imposed and hegemonic fusion of colonial ethos and divisive social systems pitched against the collectivist culture of the colonized victims societies “gave birth to a destruction and dislocation of consciousness, cultural ethics, values and environment” (13). As a foremost Nigerian dramatist, Yerima is conscious of what drama as creative art means to the society, and also aware and sufficiently conscious of the unpleasant ethical pedigree of his immediate society, Nigeria, which has been very notorious in the areas of corruption and in general moral ethos. This is the same consciousness that motivates the thematic agenda in the drama of Femi Osofisan and Effiong Johnson as illustrated in their respective creative oeuvres. Matthew Taiwo avers that “African nations of the post independence era are bedeviled by myriads of problems ranging from corruption to abject poverty, tribalism and nepotism, tyranny, thuggery, misappropriation of public funds and the most heart rending one is insurgency...” (206). In the same purview, Yerima posits succinctly that any artist nurtured in the postcolonial ferment, conscious of the complicated and turbulent history, confronted

with the stark reality of the present social experience, must as a point of duty, strive to use creativity to “educates the present and future generations and provide them with possible ideological positions through which they can confront the challenges of development” (15). Dramatic art, as cultural and socio-political material, therefore remains a veritable tool deployed to sensitize and educate society and also confront the state actors who shortchange the mass of society through indecent, corrupt and immoral behavior and misrule, bereft of vision, nor patriotism for positive change in favour of the mass of society.

### **The Dramatist, the Polity and Social Vision**

In the context of Nigeria’s contemporary socio-political reality, it is hard to separate literature from social experience and writers cannot afford to isolate the prevalent socio-political situation in their creative pursuits. Every text, generally stated, constructs a society, imagined or real; and the text is inspired by the encounters of the writer with his universe. The political order of society, in terms of the way societies are governed and how the existing socio-political system are conducted over time, affect the citizenry, essentially manifests in artistic consciousness. Literature, to a postcolonial writer thus can hardly be separated from the political order of society. According to Friday Okon, “Literature is concerned with what happens to people in time perspective, and politics has to do with the art of statecraft, of administering the state, which is made up of people”. Okon’s thought here affirms the fact that literature subtly or directly mirrors the conduct of governance in a political system. Indeed, in his critical analysis concerning the links between literature and politics, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O states that:

Literature is, of course primarily concerned with what any political and economic arrangement does to the spirit and values governing human relationship... The writer cannot be exempted from the task of exposing the distorted values of governing such a jungle precisely because this distorts healthy human relationship (xvi-xvii).

Femi Osofisan and Effiong Johnson belong to the same nation, but there is wide margin of generational gap between the two. However, what they share in common is their creative interest and shared vision that hinges at the inter-generational disappointments over a nation that promised greatness at the beginning but have continued to wobble and fumble in

terms of socio-economic development and progressive evolution, since the realization of political independence from colonial rulers. This realization simply points at the fact that in a long history of its development, Nigeria drama has continued to situate its tempo on the politics, society and social order, dating back from colonial days till the present. This is aptly demonstrated in this paper through the marrying of the vision of Osofisan who belongs to the third generation of African dramatists and Effiong Johnson who is just an emergent voice coming up in the 21st century African literary scene. Indeed, dramatic art has remained an abiding tool used by activists in their intellectual campaign for a better world order in Nigeria and elsewhere. Mabawonku and Udoinwang vividly project this consciousness in the following scenario:

Since the pioneering work of Hubert Ogunde and his Concert Party fame through the generational prodigies of the Ene Henshaw's, J. P. Clark's, the Ola Rotimi's, The Femi Osofisan's, to the sublimely engaging intellectual offerings of Wole Soyinka that epitomized the aesthetic and political ingenuity of Nigerian theatre practitioners and stage economists, successive generations of artists have continued to exert their creative energy towards addressing the artistic and the socio-economic aspirations of the Nigerian society (103).

No matter the generational differential of artists in African postcolonial ferment, the socio-political issues that remain recurrent in the various epochs, dating back to colonial era, transit from one to another and continue to refrain related and continual socio-political circumstances from the past to the present. The common grounds where the writer's vision converge have remained the commitment to ensuring social justice, achievement of national unity and equanimity, concern with guiding the society on the path of moral rectitude, sustainable socio-economic development and the overall socio-political decency of society. The African writer in any genre of artistry must strive to bring the mass of his or her society from man-made socio economic distress and must be tenacious in holding the state to accountability. Achebe contends that the African writer that:

The African writer of our time must be accountable to his society, if he fails to respond to the social and

political issues of his age, to espouse the right and just cause of his people, he is no better than an absurd man in the proverb who deserts his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flame (7).

The role of the writer in Achebe's view, as we find demonstrated in Femi Osofisan's and Effiong Johnson's play, is to use literary creativity to respond to social situations if he hopes to influence the perceptions and developmental aspirations of his society.

### **The Playwright, the Text and Context**

Femi Osofisan and Effiong Johnson in their works *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, *Fires Burn and Die Hard*, on one hand, and *The Fight Has Just Begun* and *Not without Bones* respectively, illuminate the role and place of a committed writer to his world. Femi Osofisan began his academic career in French but he has endeared himself to the literary world with his dramatic works, where he has used his literary craftsmanship to engage with the gripping realities of his society. He belongs to the third generation Nigerian writers and his artistry exudes revolutionary impulse. On the other hand, Effiong Johnson also has a theatre background and belongs to the new or younger generation Nigerian literary writers with a stint for radical transformation of society.

The recurrent thematic concerns pursued by the two authors in the contexts of this paper, are centered on the issues of corruption and moral malfeasance that are prevalent in the societies construed in their respective plays. The world they try to deconstruct is a fragmented universe where greed and perversion hold sway, and the powerful pitch their interest against the collective welfare of the people. Essentially, the issues of corruption and moral perversion are strategically metaphorised in the dialogues, the different scenes and settings witnessed in the plots of each of the plays, remain centered on the sickening reality of the creative milieu. Through these texts Osofisan and Johnson in their diverse styles and approaches flag some kind of metaphorical torchlight with which to illuminate the society captured in the artistic vision. All these themes are carefully woven into complex plots that characterize most of their plays. Osofisan and Johnson in the *Oriki of a Grasshopper*, *Fires Burn and Die Hard* on one hand, and in *Not Without Bones* and *The Fight Has Just Begun* respectively, capture the spates of malpractices that are common in the social ferments where the performances are set. By their shared strategies, Osofisan and Johnson try to expose the footprints of corruption and

oppressive tendencies perpetuated by the elite class, and by so doing they project into the possibilities of a collective resistance by the masses of the people towards revolutionary change in society.

For instance, in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* and *Fires Burn and Die Hard*, Osofisan uses characterization and dialogue to expose the activities of the powerful in society who corrupt the society by using their privileged position to force their ways through in their pursuit of greed, domination and power. Indeed, many of Osofisan's plays are envisioned to mirror the social reality manifesting in the day-to-day encounters in his society. The plays strive to unravel the disorder and the multifaceted effects of the identified social ills that continue to plague postcolonial societies. In *Fires Burn and Die Hard* for instance, one of the key characters, Alhaja, is portrayed to serve as a cogent metaphor for corruption, and indeed, Alhaja kind of personifies corruption, through her acts and confessions. She is by every role she plays in the scenes, blinded by greed. In the dialogue below, she confesses:

**ALHAJA:** Money! What else matters in this world? What else is our husbands and fathers rolled into one? What is our brother and sister and our friend all at the same time? Is not money? What door cannot be opened with cash? What obstacle cannot be swept aside? (*Fires Burn*, 90-91).

Having bribed her way through to import contraband goods, Alhaja seeks to corrupt her son's moral standing. But since she cannot stop him from going to the police, she resorts to setting the entire market ablaze in order to destroy the evidence against her. Thus, Alhaja destroys the source of livelihood of the same women whose interest she should have protected, as a privileged member of society. Similarly, Osofisan shows in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* that corrupt leadership is at the core of many of the problems besetting post-colonial African states. Moni shows the insincerity of many African leaders in her references to Claudius, the corrupt, profiteering business man:

**MONI:** You're a businessman, you live by sucking others. You cheat and extort and ruin others, and call it making profits  
(*The Oriki of a...* 24).

Thus, the playwright condemns the exploitative tendencies of many African leaders whose sense of morality have been completely eroded by greed and instinct for domination.

To confront such unpleasant social situation, Osofisan seems to believe that no individual would be able to correct these multifaceted anomalies in society and thus tends to propose collaboration and collective action of the mass of the oppressed. This could be ascertained when it is observed that in his revolutionary theatre, there is always a preference for tension between the strong and the weak and underprivileged in terms of characterization. So, collaboration is preferable in Osofisan's prognosis for social revolution and sustainable change and development. He believes that collective action works better than individual heroism. He often employs the collective "WE" on many occasions to galvanize the people to action. In *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, for instance, Osofisan consistently uses "WE" to show the collective consciousness of the youth as shown in the following instances: "We, form a wide ring of wishes" (*The Oriki of a...* 46); "We, the young and the gifted of Africa" (*The Oriki of a...* 38); "We, the educated and the articulate" (*The Oriki of a...* 38), and many other instances. To further affirm this artistic preference, Osofisan in an interview explained the reason why he prefers collective action to individual solution stating that "enduring revolution work is collective work of people acting together... The individual is usually a good catalyst... somebody that triggers off things. But in the end he is not the one who is going to do the work (Awodiya, 116-117). All this points out the conviction and thought of the playwright that no lone individual can on his own bring about meaningful and significant change in the society.

To further accentuate his revolutionary vision that would sweep away the tendencies of corruption and oppressions in his creative universe, Osofisan gives some roles to his characters that are significant, instructive and thought-provoking. Muyiwa Awodiya posits further that "the theme of revolution permeates almost all the plays of Femi Osofisan. There is revolution in form and in content in the plays" (80). *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* opens with preparations for a revolution which however, remains elusive until the end of the play. This strategy in itself simply portrays the point that meaningful and sweeping change never comes easy. In Osofisan's perception, the revolutionary must be a role model, a way shower and resilient, intelligent and sagacious in his approach, but must as well operate with team spirit. This is demonstrated in the

conversational scene where the character Claudius makes a statement that turns out to be enlightening and probing. Despite the fact that Claudius belongs to the oppressor class, he admires the revolutionary spirit in the younger generation. The following statement is pointing:

**CLAUDIUS:** ... and I know that our hope will be in vain, that there will be no new generation, if the real teachers quit, if no one remains to nurture the fresh minds... (*The Oriki of a...* 36).

Through the role of the character Moni in *The Oriki of a...*, the playwright shows the futility of an irrational vision of revolution which does not consider the prevailing socio-political realities and the task involved in the process of ushering in change. The playwright does not support die-hard revolutionaries who are bereft of reason or properly articulated direction. Nevertheless, the fire ignited by the spirit of revolution continues to burn in the audience as they depart with the optimistic wish for freedom through revolution. The seed of revolution is therefore sown in the fertile minds of the audience as they leave in the hope that it will soon materialize in form of positive change.

The same revolutionary impulse is evident in *Fires Burn and Die Hard*, especially as portrayed by the roles played by women in the acts. Although the revolution, again is not enacted just as in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, however the spirit is seen among the women who are set to confront the authorities for refusing to open the new market which is the economic live-wire of the people. Alhaja attests to this revolutionary spirit in the market women as she is awed by the zeal, energy and determination of the women in her dialogue with the character Ibra:

**ALHAJA:** It's not me who will go and face the women ...ten thousand of us, you know... and give them this kind of news. Or don't you know what you're saying at all?  
(*Fires Burn...* 68)

Despite the fact that she is later identified as the real culprit behind the market fire incident, the revolutionary instinct in the women is not dampened as their main goal remains to enthrone positive change. In consonance with the moral code of the society, the women, instead of shielding Alhaja from punishment, allow her to offer the sacrifice in order



to purge the land of impending doom. Alhaja is compelled to understand the demands of a morally sound society as such she submits to the demands of Ifa:

**ALHAJA:** The morals of the market are quite rigid, but they are the same as the morals of the mosque or of the church.  
(*Fires Burn...* 91).

By allowing Alhaja to bear the full weight of the law, the women demonstrate that when revolution is devoid of morality, it is blind and is bound to fail. This situation also depicts the importance of collectivity, determination, persistence and courage as important factors to be considered and imbibed if revolutionary action must be given a proper thrust.

The literary techniques employed in a work of art can among other things give valuable insight into the mood and vision of the author to the audience. So be it with Osofisan, who regularly experiments with various styles of drama presentation to determine which forms are the most suitable vehicles to convey his messages. Thus, he employs a comprehensive range of forms suitable to convey his message to the audience from time to time. Because of his avid commitment to the process of social revolution, Osofisan tilts the tempo of his plays towards an eventual realization of revolutionary social change for a better society in the universe of his dramaturgy. One aspect of style that is a significant aesthetic feature of *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* for instance, is seen in its economy of cast. It is a one-act play in which only three characters are used. Imaro and Moni are both socialists: they unite to constitute the collective strength which Osofisan explores in the plays. As a combined force, the duo serves as a foil to the capitalist ideals propagated by Claudius who represents the oppressor class. The play is dominated by dialogue instead of action. The dialogue is used to reveal the socialist objective of the playwright which is to use drama to dislodge the exploitative and oppressive capitalist system that has become deeply entrenched in many African societies. The dialogue of the play also reveals the dialectics of the relationship of the two classes in the society and the survival strategy adopted by each. For example, the capitalists rely heavily on money and power as weapons to influence negatively the morale of the socialists about the hope of revolution which, to the capitalists, remains an illusion as Claudius mockingly taunts.

**CLAUDIUS:** Yes, tell me! What is it like, this revolution I hear so much about! This Godot that will sweep everything away and bring paradise. A scene in a play? All the words you throw about, your savage gestures, your wild waving fists in the air, what do they amount to? To a room in a prison cell? Boots in the crotch? Or electrodes on the nerve centers? You think those will make you more revolutionary endless of a face?

(*The Oriki of a...* 25-26).

Claudius and his capitalist cohort believe that the clamor for change by the socialists will never materialize since they lack the basic economic resources needed for the pursuit of change. His position reveals another technique employed by this playwright to enhance the aesthetic quality of the play's suspense.

In *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, the anticipated event is the revolution which Moni and Imaro anxiously await, but which never comes. The reader is in sympathy with Moni and Imaro and the masses whom they represent. But Osofisan does not allow the audience to experience the purgation of their emotion which the revolution would have initiated. Suspense is also evident in *Fires Burn and Die Hard* where the opening of the market is delayed to the chagrin and disappointment of the market women. Tension and anxiety mount as the women and the reader wait patiently to know who had desecrated the land which must be cleansed before the ceremonial opening of the market. Against all expectations, Alhaja is revealed towards the end as the real culprit; but before the revolution, the audience had seen the self-sacrificing spirit needed by everyone to achieve emancipation. Temi demonstrates this spirit by offering to bear the punishment to save the majority. Again Osofisan teaches a moral lesson – the need for personal and collective sacrifice to salvage the nation.

Another important strategy deployed by Osofisan to buttress his revolutionary vision and commitment to social change manifests in the way the playwright appropriates language and aspects of style to drive home his artistic vision. Language use or diction is of primary importance to drama since it thrives on action and dialogue. The language must therefore be carefully chosen to reflect the temper and mood of the play

and must suit and be persuasive to the audience. Lukacs contends that a writer can only affect his reader positively when he endeavors “to seek the specific artistic form adequate to his specific content” (134). In *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* for instance, language identifies each of the two opposing classes in contention of the play. For example, Claudius confesses:

**CLAUDIUS:** I don't know what you mean, I'm a businessman, I make my money... (*The Oriki of a ...* 7). But Imaro replies:

**IMARO:** And I'm an intellectual, As they say, I make words...(7).

The above dialogue points to the status and class of the characters. Also Moni's description of the capitalists reveals their character and the revolutionary impulse of the play in the scene of the dialogue below:

**MONI:** You don't understand, Mr. Claudius, and I don't expect you to. You're a businessman. You cheat and extort and ruin others and you call it making profits (*The Oriki of a ...* 24).

But in contrast, Claudius retorts:

**CLAUDIUS:** All the words you throw about, your savage gestures, your wild waving fists in the air, what do they all amount to? To a room in a prison cell? Boots in the crotch? Or electrodes on the nerve-centers? (*The Oriki of a ...* 25-26).

The above dialogue is reminiscent of the conditions in many capitalist societies where the capitalists use intimidation to subjugate the masses to silent and to acceptance of exploitation and oppression.

Effiong Johnson's *The Fight Has Just Begun* and *Not without Bones* share related thematic agenda with Osoafisan in the plays that are the concern this paper, although the approaches and modus operandi of presentation and enactment may vary. But at the core of Johnson's dramatic engagement is the same vexed issue of corruption and oppression. Johnson equally pitches his creative and social vision on the state of the politics and the drive for revolutionary social change that are perceived as prerequisite for a better society. Like Osofisan, Johnson draws on the

memory of the colonial past with the crisis that attended the epoch, to probe into the present postcolonial socio-political circumstances. In *Not without Bones* Johnson contends that corrupt leadership was the factor most responsible for the Women's war of 1929 in colonial Nigeria. The women and the entire people as recreated in the play are confronted with complex, oppressive and exploitative situations, ranging from corrupt and tyrannical warrant chiefs to excessive exploitation and oppression by the educated elites and neocolonial agents of the colonial government. This past evil, based on the historiography of colonial encounter, is dramatized as a means of cautioning the present generation that except things are done differently, the result would always be the same. In other words, no good could ever come from bad in the process of social evolution. The point here is that history should be a teacher; that a people could be oppressed but a time comes that the oppressed would rise up to confront dictatorial and oppressive power. Clement Odiako thus avers that "the modern African drama transcends the theatrical performance" in the attempt "to bring the stage and society into a harmonious social relationship" (319). Johnson's play in context is rooted on historical reality that the conscious audience should be well familiar with.

Johnson shows that although men lacked the moral justification required to resist the colonial government and its corrupt agents because they (the men) compromised their moral standing through bribery and corruption. Consequently, they are unable to mobilize forces against the colonial masters, which is what paved way for the women to take over the struggle. As rightly observed by the key character, Ekaibani in the play *Not without Bones*, "We have assembled women because our men have failed...Our social and moral structures have all been dislocated" (*Not Without...* 9). By this creative statement, Johnson is simply illustrating the point that social change and revolutionary transformation of the polity could be brought about by any group, irrespective of gender differential. This position echoes Osofisan's prescription that revolutionary social change takes a collective, courageous, determined and visionary temperament of any group of the oppressed people. The success recorded by the struggling women in the prosecution of the anti-imperialist war reveals the debilitating effect of lack of moral standards on the part of the leaders. In other words, corruption in leadership has multiplier effect that limits positive action on the society. The 5th of the woman characters in the play paints the picture that illuminates the scenario that engenders the conflicts and the compulsion for revolutionary change:

**5<sup>TH</sup> WOMAN:** It is too bad. The land is changed. We are dying. The chiefs that the whiteman has appointed are receiving bribes. And people who know book ... are oppressing us too much. Our oil does not fetch money anymore. We take goats and yams to the market to sell, court messengers and those who wear uniforms seize all these items from us to the whiteman (*Not without...*10).

Thus, political suppression and economic exploitation of the masses by leaders often result in socialist, revolutionary group resistance. This is Johnson's position in *Not without Bones*.

Similarly, in *The Fight Has Just Begun*, Johnson uses the dialogue and arguments in the play to condemn the dictatorial and greedy character of many African leaders and the tendency for such leaders to perpetuate themselves in power even when it is obvious that they have lost relevance. Such leaders sacrifice moral rectitude in order to retain political power. This situation is well illustrated in the play by the struggle for the crown between Imo's camp and Ekarika's camp. Having usurped the throne, Ekarika is confident that he has resources to win the support of the corrupt king makers, to perpetuate his rule. The scene below gives hints to an important thematic aspect of Johnson's plays:

**EKARIKA:** I don't care what he told you, I don't care whether you found him in the village council preaching sabotage against me. Right now! I only care about one thing. One last thing and that is putting this crown on my head!... and remaining the king of Mobio (*The Fight Has...*40).

It is the blind ambition expressed in Ekarika's speech which many post-independent African leaders have embraced that has resulted in widespread corruption and the suppression of dissenting voices in African politics. Consequently, Ayara becomes the conscience of Mobio Society as he refuses to compromise his stance on morality grounds, even though he is swept off by the tide of tyranny:

**AYARA:** There is ambition in the palace. It is good to be ambitious. But the ambition to the right is what Ayara supports. I, Ayara who had ruled this

land and known what it is to be loyal to established traditions, cannot be persuaded by selfish ambition, the ambition to hide corruption, that is what drove them to this insanity despite my warnings (*The Fight Has ...* 30-31)

Johnson therefore contends through Ayara that corrupt leadership in Africa is fostered by the inordinate ambition to retain political and economic power. This tendency is rooted in colonial experience with its divisive, dubious and arbitrary tendencies. This is also the position of Osofisan in both *The Oriki of a Grasshopper* and *Fires Burn and Die Hard*.

Johnson in *The Fight Has just Begun* and *Not without Bones* also projects a kind of Osofisan's thought on the modus operandi of realizing meaningful social change and revolutionary transformation of society. Johnson pushes for collective consciousness, resilience, teamwork and commitment towards ensuring set revolutionary objectives. For example, the women in *Not Without Bones* assure Ekaiban of their support when the 3thWoman says "Eka we must unite and send all whitemen out of our country" (*Not without a...* 9). Similarly, Etido in *The Fight Has Just Begun* despite his gallantry, still relies on collective strength for success when he asserts, "We must press, further until we get to a positive conclusion" (*The Fight Has...*19). Again, Etido falls back on collaborative effort when he vows: "We will resist them" (*The Fight Has...*28). Thus, Johnson like Osofisan adopts the theatre of collaboration to fulfill his roles as a social commentator using drama as his social medium. Moreover, this theme of collaboration helps the playwrights to show the audience (the masses) the need for collective stance in their struggle to achieve liberation from capitalist exploiters and oppressors. This concurs with Kalu Uka's assertion that: "The play lends evidence to the idea that those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable. It also underscores the fact that when people are united in their stand against a policy of state, they will always win" (446).

Interestingly, Johnson imbues his play with the same kind of revolutionary impulse as evident in Osofisan's plays. In *The Fight Has Just Begun* for instance, revolution is seen as the panacea for exploitation, corruption and oppression, which Johnson tends to initiate through violent struggles. This is buttressed by Etido when he asserts:

**ETIDO:** There comes a time in a people's life that they must fight as a price for liberty (*The Fight Has...* 52).

Therefore, revolution that is well articulated leads to positive change but this change does not come without a price. Although violence may be perceived as being morally wrong since it most often leads to the destruction of humanity, however, this is necessary as the price that must be paid to achieve positive change, as Etido asserts:

**ETIDO:** Come along brother for a sacred dedication of ourselves before the sky and earth...we must press further until we get to a positive conclusion (*The Fight Has ...*19).

The playwright shows that since the oppressors employ violence as an instrument of subjugation, the oppressed must at some point resort to violence in order to confront the corrupt system. Consequently, Johnson seems to agree with Fanon that "Violence will only yield when confronted with greater violence" (Fanon, 38). However, it is in *Not without Bones* that Johnson propagates more vigorously revolutionary ideals because the entire play hinges on revolutionary social change, which is triggered by the insensitive and indifferent leadership of the colonial government which the women are determined to confront through Ekaiban:

**EKAIBAN:** Women of Opobo, we have decided to say no more to the Whiteman and all his tricks... we must unite and send all whitemen out of our country (*Not without...*8).

Despite the loss of several women in the ensuing violence, the revolution succeeds as the imperial government submits to the demands of the women. Even the District Officer acknowledges the noble sacrifice of the brave women in his solemn speech:

**D.O:** I think these women heroes have stunned us with their bravery and rare commitment. In the military it is the mark of honor to salute ideal military heroes at their burial sites with a number of gunshots. These women, whose defying feats have assembled us here, deserve that honor (*Not without...*68).

This recognition as well as the compensation given to them for their struggle and deprivation agrees with the moral and social justice which both Osofisan and Johnson strive to enthrone in the society portrayed in their respective plays.

Like in Osofisan's plays, suspense is also a major aspect of style that Johnson has applied in his plays. In *The Fight Has Just Begun*, he employs suspense to delay the anticipated change. Early in the play Etido declared: "Change is imminent" (*The Fight Has...2*). This change which is expected as a result in the dethronement of Ekarika and the enthronement of Imo is delayed. Just as in *The Oriki of a Grasshopper*, the revolution does not happen here but the tension is sustained and gets almost palpable until towards the end of the play as the volatile situation explodes into violence and bloodshed, which serves as precursor to the impending revolution. As earlier stated, language could be used to enhance the aesthetic and moral qualities of a work. For Johnson, language serves as a vehicle through which the themes of oppression, corruption, exploitation and violence are revealed. These themes run through *The Fight Has Just Begun* and *Not without Bones*; and the playwright employs both literal and figurative language in presenting these thematic concerns. For instance, the 5th woman in very clear language identifies the root of the conflict which the playwright explores in the text. She states:

**5TH WOMAN:** It is too bad. The land is changed. We are dying. These chiefs that the whitemen has appointed are receiving too much bribe. And the people, who know book, oh God, are oppressing us too much (*Not without... 10*).

The use of language in the text shows that the playwright employs literal language as shown in the above quotation in connection with the whites. But the playwright uses figurative language in dialogue among the women. For example, Ekaiban makes the women understand the need for resilience and determination in their fight for liberation through the use of a proverb which they understand well as she tells them:

**EKAIBAN:** Until the tree is down, the axe shall not rest. And this strange tree, though it has grown so big within a very short time, though its branches are



scattered about, it shall be cut down before the axe  
can rest (*Not without...42*)

The 'tree' in the above excerpt is a metaphor for everything that represents the whites and their oppressive administrative machinery which the women need to conquer in order to gain their freedom. The playwright also uses language to identify his characters. Thus, characters use language according to their status. Nteitafiong in *Not without Bones* uses parables, proverbs and riddles which the women do not understand. He states thus:

**NTEITAFIONG:** The face that harbors a crime must have a wrinkle, no matter the amount of powder on it. The he-goat's odour can never be mistaken. What else smells like that? The chameleon is an ugly animal but has the singular talent of changing its skin to suit its environment. (*Not Without... 19-20*).

The reader is not surprised as Nteitafiong's language as it suits his role as a soothsayer and a symbol of the people's spiritual life. Meanwhile, the same trend of language is also evident in *The Fight Has Just Begun*. Akpaisong as a chief and custodian of the people's tradition and culture makes elaborate use of proverbs in his speech. For instance, in trying to unravel the mystery surrounding Udobong's murder and the inevitability of retributive justice on the murder, Akpaisong has this to say:

**AKPAISONG:** The fish that swallows a hook may swim frantically about. The fisherman knows just how far it will go.  
(*The Fight Has... 23*).

In a similar vein, Ayara a former king of Mobio and a respected elder of the village warns against the evil of dictatorship which Ekarika is bent on pursuing by his plot to extend his reign beyond the customary seven years, Ayara tells Ekarika:

**AYARA:** A stubborn cock learns his lesson in a soup pot. My prayer is that the innocent will be spared, because heads may roll (*The Fight Has...41-42*).

Thus, the playwright employs proverbs at crucial moments not just as an aesthetic element but as a means of situating action and delineating characters in their roles. In all, both Osofisan and Johnson use their dramaturgies to explore themes and social concerns that are germane to the needs of the society. Their strategies in the deployment of techniques are, in diverse and unique ways, aimed at projecting the moral and aesthetic values that are necessary for the realization of their vision of a free and just society.

### **Conclusion**

In the four plays analyzed in this paper, it is clearly evident that Femi Osofisan and Effiong Johnson use their artistry to project the lingering socio-political realities of the universe of their creativity. It is also clear that irrespective of the generational gap between the two playwrights, they share similar ideals, related vision and intertwining desires to lift their much fragmented society from the longstanding lowly condition to a better, more economically progressive universe that would be all-inclusive, egalitarian and just. Through their individual styles and techniques, the two playwrights not only share revolutionary ideological parameters for change, but their works equally share philosophical point of view in terms of the utility of drama for social mobilization and for socio-political change. Also, it is evidence that their performances tend to ginger the oppressed into action, just as they serve to illuminate the socio-political ambience of their works, and posture them as precursors to revolutionary vision and activism for radical change. The two dramatic personalities also use their drama as media for the articulation of social transformation not just in their immediate society but in the world at large. Their works position them as visionary, activists and committed patriots, who are motivated by the need to use their creative ingenuity for the cultivation and propagation of a just, economically sound and morally upright society. Their artistry serve as veritable tools as well as role model for the illumination of the realities of their social world and for the explication of the direction and modus operandi for ushering in the much anticipated revolutionary transformation of the world.

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