

**POLITICAL SATIRE IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S "WHO IS AFRAID OF
SOLARIN?" AND "ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS"**

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**UNIVERSITY OF BENIN,
BENIN CITY.**

JANUARY, 2025

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**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE
ARTS, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS DEGREE IN THEATRE ARTS.**

JANUARY 2025

DECLARATION

This project is based on the study undertaken by me in the Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin under the supervision of Mr. Andrew Ogbeide. This project work has not been submitted before now for the award of a degree elsewhere and all ideas are products of my findings and the view of others employed in the making, they were duly acknowledged.

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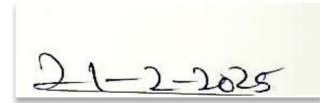
CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that I, Akatika, Prince Ewhomazino, an undergraduate student of Theatre and Performing Arts, University of Benin, with Matriculation Number ART2004924 has satisfactorily completed the requirement for the course work and project for the award of Bachelor of Arts (B.A) HONS. Degree in the Department of Theatre and Performing Arts, University of Benin.

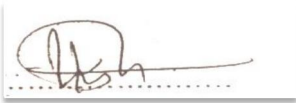
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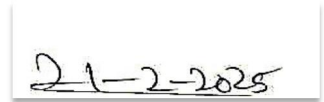
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Head of Department



Date



DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, for keeping me alive and sustained during the course of this and all of my Educational Endeavors.

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.

First and foremost, I am profoundly grateful to my Project Supervisor, Mr. Andrew Ogbeide whose expertise, patience, and insightful feedback have been invaluable. Your guidance has been instrumental in shaping this project, and your encouragement has kept me motivated throughout this journey. Also, my Love goes to my Family Members, my Parents; Mr. Stephen Akatika, for his advice, support and Guidance all through my Academic Pursuits, and my Mom, Mrs. Regina Akatika, for her Care and never ending Prayers. Then, my siblings, Miss. Paula Akatika, my life-long aide, and Master Marvin Akatika, my little brother.

I would also like to thank the faculty and staff of the Theatre Arts Department, University of Benin for providing a conducive academic environment and the necessary resources to complete this research. Special thanks to Dr. Mudiagha and Dr. Miss Awele for their constructive criticism and support.

I am also grateful to the researchers, participants and audiences who engaged with the plays "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers." Your insights and perspectives have enriched this study.

Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the playwright, Femi Osofisan, whose brilliant works have inspired this research. Your contributions to Nigerian theatre and literature are truly remarkable.

Thank you all for your support and encouragement. This project would not have been possible without you. Finally, my heartfelt appreciation goes to my family and friends for

their unwavering support and understanding. To my parents, Mr. Stephen and Mrs. Regina Akatika, thank you for your endless encouragement and for believing in me. To my friends, Prosper, Bright, Clinton, and Melanie, your companionship and moral support have been a source of strength and inspiration to me.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of political satire in contemporary Nigerian theatre through a critical analysis of Femi Osofisan's plays *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* (1978) and *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980). Grounded in Marxist theory and dialectical materialism, the research explores how Osofisan employs humor, wit, and satire to critique Nigeria's sociopolitical realities, including corruption, inequality, and systemic injustice. By blending traditional African performance elements with modern theatrical techniques, Osofisan crafts narratives that reflect the complexities of postcolonial Nigeria while resonating with universal themes. The study adopts a qualitative methodology, combining textual analysis of the plays' language, characterization, and thematic content with an examination of audience reception. A comparative analysis reveals both plays' shared focus on exposing moral decay and political hypocrisy, though they differ in their satirical approaches. *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* employs Horatian satire to lampoon bureaucratic corruption, while *Once Upon Four Robbers* adopts a darker, Juvenalian tone to interrogate socioeconomic disparities and the cyclical nature of crime. Key findings highlight Osofisan's success in using satire to provoke critical reflection and engage audiences in sociopolitical discourse. However, the study identifies limitations in the Marxist framework of the plays, particularly the lack of clear class struggle and the ambiguous resolution of revolutionary ideals. While Osofisan's works advocate for social change, they often prioritize individual flaws over systemic critique, diluting their alignment with orthodox Marxist principles. This research contributes to scholarship on Nigerian theatre by elucidating the interplay between satire, politics, and cultural hybridity in Osofisan's dramaturgy.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction:

This study focuses on Femi Osofisan's use of satirical elements as tools for political commentary in contemporary Nigerian theatre, specifically examining two seminal works by the renowned playwright: "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once upon Four Robbers."

Theatre in general has long served as a mirror to society, reflecting its triumphs, tribulations, and complexities. In Nigeria, a nation with a rich cultural tapestry and a tumultuous political history, the stage has become a powerful platform for social commentary and critique. Among the various theatrical forms employed by Nigerian playwrights, satire stands out as a particularly potent tool for addressing sociopolitical issues.

Nigeria's political landscape, characterized by periods of military rule, corruption, and socioeconomic challenges, has provided fertile ground for satirists. The country's journey from colonial rule to independence in 1960, followed by a series of military coups and a civil war, created a complex sociopolitical environment that continues to influence Nigerian society today. It is within this context that Nigerian theatre, particularly political satire, has flourished as a means of social critique and commentary.

The return to civilian rule in 1979, after years of military dictatorship, marked a significant turning point in Nigeria's history. It was during this period of transition and hope that Osofisan penned the two plays central to this study. "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" (1978) and "Once upon Four Robbers" (1980) emerged as powerful commentaries on the state of the nation, addressing issues that continue to resonate in contemporary Nigerian society.

Satire, as a literary genre, has ancient roots. Its origins can be traced back to Greek and Roman literature, where writers like Aristophanes and Juvenal used satire to critique politics and societal norms. Aristophanes, often referred to as the "Father of Comedy," employed satire in his plays to lampoon the political figures and social customs of ancient Athens. This form of critique has been used to challenge power structures, expose corruption, and provoke social change.

In the Nigerian context, political satire in theatre builds upon a rich tradition of oral storytelling and performance that often incorporated elements of social critique. The fusion of these traditional forms with modern theatrical techniques has given rise to a uniquely Nigerian form of political satire, of which Osofisan is a master practitioner.

Born on June 16, 1946, in Erunwon, a Yoruba town in Nigeria's Ogun State, Babafemi Osofisan is celebrated as one of the nation's foremost literary critics and playwrights. His academic journey included studies at the University of Ibadan and the

Sorbonne in Paris. After serving as a Professor at the University of Ibadan, he currently holds the title of Distinguished Professor at Kwara State University.

Belonging to “an earlier generation of the educated middle class which led Nigeria’s nationalist struggle against English imperialism, Femi Osofisan harbored a hopeful vision of the nascent nation’s destiny as Africa’s beacon of democracy and prosperity. Such optimism, however, languished in a morass of post-independence corruption, military dictatorship, and poverty.” His works thus became characterized by a keen social consciousness and a masterful use of satire to critique societal ills and political issues in Nigeria.

He has consistently portrayed this in his earlier works such as *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* (1978), a satire on the corrupt state of Nigeria and an adaptation of Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* (1836). In "*Who's Afraid of Solarin?*" Osofisan satirizes the political landscape of Nigeria. The play uses humor to expose the corruption and absurdity of power struggles, highlighting the moral decay within the political system. Similarly; “*Once upon Four Robbers*” teases out the themes of crime (armed-robbery) and corruption prevalent in the Nigerian society.

Osofisan's plays often blend traditional African performance elements with modern theatrical techniques, creating a unique style that speaks directly to Nigerian audiences while maintaining universal appeal. His use of Humor serves not only to entertain but also to soften the blow of his often scathing critiques, making his messages more

palatable and, arguably, more effective. He also employs Wit to critique the greed and moral decay prevalent in society. His characters' witty exchanges and the humorous situations in his plays serve to underscore the serious message about the consequences of unchecked ambition and corruption. By making the audience laugh, Osofisan also makes them think.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Political satire, a potent tool for social commentary and critique, has long held a prominent place in the annals of literature and performance. It wields humor, irony, and exaggeration to expose the flaws, vices, and absurdities of political figures, institutions, and societal norms, challenging authority and provoking thought. In the context of Nigerian theatre, political satire emerges as a vital force, navigating the complex sociopolitical landscape of a nation grappling with a tumultuous history marked by military coups, civil war, corruption, and fluctuating democratic governance.

In oppressive or corrupt regimes, satire becomes a "weapon of the weak" (Scott, 1985), allowing playwrights and authors to comment on political and social issues indirectly, thus evading censorship and engaging audiences on controversial matters (Obadare, 2009). Nigerian theatre, deeply rooted in social and political commentary, has embraced this approach, especially during periods of military dictatorship, when direct criticism was often suppressed. Satire thus offers both critique and a means of solidarity, especially in contexts where speaking out can have significant repercussions.

Despite the significant role of political satire in Nigerian theatre and the widespread recognition of Osofisan's contributions to the field, there is a paucity of comprehensive studies examining the effectiveness of satirical techniques in reflecting and critiquing sociopolitical realities. While numerous scholars have analyzed various aspects of Osofisan's works, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific use of humor and wit as tools for political commentary in "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers."

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of these two plays in terms of their satirical techniques and thematic concerns remains largely unexplored. Each play has been studied individually, but few researchers have attempted to draw connections between them or to examine how they collectively contribute to our understanding of political satire in Nigerian theatre.

This research seeks to address these gaps by providing a detailed analysis of the satirical elements in both plays, exploring how they reflect Nigerian sociopolitical realities, and examining their potential impact on political discourse and social consciousness. By focusing on these specific works, this study aims to contribute to the broader understanding of political satire's role in contemporary Nigerian theatre and its effectiveness as a tool for social critique.

1.3 Objectives of the Study:

The primary objectives of this study are to:

- I. Analyze the use of political satire, humor, and wit in "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers," identifying the specific techniques employed by Osofisan to critique sociopolitical issues;
- II. Identify and examine the specific sociopolitical realities reflected in these plays, situating them within their historical context and exploring their relevance to contemporary Nigerian society;
- III. Compare and contrast the satirical techniques employed in both works, highlighting similarities and differences in Osofisan's approach to different themes and issues;
- IV. Evaluate the effectiveness of Osofisan's satirical approach in fostering political discourse and social consciousness, considering both the immediate impact of the plays and their enduring relevance;
- V. Contribute to the broader understanding of political satire's role in contemporary Nigerian theatre, situating Osofisan's works within the larger context of African and world literature; and
- VI. Investigate the potential of political satire in theatre as a tool for social change, using Osofisan's works as case studies to discuss the broader implications for Nigerian society and politics;

Research Questions:

This study seeks to answer the following questions:

I. How does Femi Osofisan employ political satire, humor, and wit in "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers"? What specific techniques does he use to critique sociopolitical issues?

II. What specific sociopolitical realities of Nigeria are reflected in these plays? How do these reflections relate to the historical context in which the plays were written, and how do they remain relevant to contemporary Nigerian society?

III. What are the satirical techniques employed in both works? How does Osofisan use their similarities and differences to address issues?

IV. How effective is Osofisan's approach of using satire in fostering political discourse and social consciousness, in both plays?

V. How does Osofisan's works on political satire in Nigerian theatre contribute to African and global literature?

VI. How is political satire a potential tool for social change? How does a deep study of Osofisan's works help to understand the Nigerian Society and Politics?

1.4 Significance of the Study:

This research contributes to the field of Nigerian literary studies and theatre arts in several significant ways:

Comprehensive Analysis of Political Satire: By providing a detailed analysis of political satire in two significant works by a major Nigerian playwright, this study offers

new insights into Osofisan's satirical techniques and their effectiveness. This contributes to our understanding of how satire functions in Nigerian theatre and its potential as a tool for social critique.

Examination of Theatre as Sociopolitical Commentary: This study offers a comprehensive examination of how theatre can serve as a medium for sociopolitical commentary in Nigeria. By analyzing Osofisan's plays, we gain insights into how dramatic works can engage with and critique social and political issues, potentially informing future playwrights and theatre practitioners.

Comparative Analysis of Osofisan's Works: By comparing two of Osofisan's plays, this study provides a more nuanced understanding of his evolving approach to political satire and his responses to changing sociopolitical realities. This comparative approach offers insights into the development of Osofisan's craft and the evolution of political satire in Nigerian theatre more broadly.

Contextualization within African Literature: This study situates Osofisan's works within the broader context of African literature and world theatre, contributing to discussions about the role of satire in postcolonial societies. By examining how Osofisan engages with specifically Nigerian issues while also addressing universal themes, we gain insights into the global relevance of African theatre.

Resource for Future Scholarship: This study may serve as a valuable resource for future scholars studying Nigerian theatre, political satire, or Femi Osofisan's works. By

providing a comprehensive analysis of these two plays, it offers a foundation for further research and exploration in these areas.

Insights into Theatre's Role in Social Change: By examining the potential impact of Osofisan's plays on political awareness and social change in Nigeria, this study offers insights that could be valuable to policymakers, educators, and social activists. It contributes to our understanding of how artistic works can influence social and political discourse.

1.5 Scope and Limitations:

This study focuses specifically on two plays by Femi Osofisan: "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" (1978) and "Once Upon Four Robbers" (1980). While these works are representative of Osofisan's satirical style and are significant contributions to Nigerian theatre, the findings may not be generalizable to all of his works or to Nigerian political satire as a whole. The study is primarily concerned with textual analysis and the plays' thematic content, rather than with performance aspects or reception history.

The research is limited to the examination of the plays' texts and relevant secondary literature. It does not include empirical data on audience reception or the plays' performance history, which could provide additional insights into their impact and effectiveness. While historical context is considered to situate the plays within their sociopolitical milieu, the primary focus is on the texts themselves rather than on broader sociopolitical trends in Nigeria.

Furthermore, while the study touches on the potential of these plays as tools for social change, it does not attempt to measure their actual impact on Nigerian society or politics. Such an assessment would require a different methodological approach and is beyond the scope of this Project.

It is also important to note that, to a researcher not native to Nigeria, the interpretation of the plays and their cultural context may be limited to an insider perspective. While every effort has been made to engage with external scholarship and to approach the texts with cultural sensitivity, there may be nuances or diverse cultural references that are not fully captured in this analysis.

Despite these limitations, this study aims to provide valuable insights into Osofisan's use of political satire and its significance within Nigerian theatre. By focusing on a close analysis of these two plays, we can gain a deeper understanding of how political satire functions in this context, while also opening avenues for future research in this area.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms:

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

I. Political Satire: The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize and expose contemporary politics and politicians. In the context of this study, it refers specifically to the use of these techniques in theatrical works to comment on Nigerian sociopolitical realities.

II. Marxism

III. Sociopolitical Realities: The social and political conditions, issues, and dynamics present in a society at a given time. In this study, it refers specifically to the Nigerian context, including issues such as corruption, social inequality, and political instability.

IV. Humor: The quality of being amusing or comic, especially as expressed in literature or speech. In Osofisan's works, humor is often used as a vehicle for serious social commentary.

V. Social Consciousness: Awareness of important social and political issues affecting one's society, often coupled with a sense of responsibility to address these issues

VI. Dialectic Materialism

1.7 Theoretical Framework:

Analyzing the essence of a problem reveals that it arises from the clash of elements leading to mental confusion, an unwanted outcome, or a conflict that obscures the right path forward.

The theoretical framework adopted for this study thus aids in specifying which variables to assess and the statistical connections to investigate. To clarify this concept, it is essential to consider Bernard Beckerman's assertion 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"

A theoretical framework provides a viewpoint, perspective, and analytical lens through which the researcher examines the issue. Consequently, choosing an appropriate framework is essential, serving as both a categorizing and selective criterion in the research process (Marx Weber, 1 of 7). Accordingly, employing Karl Marx's theory of Dialectical Materialism in this study is deemed essential and necessary.

Dialectical Materialism can help in analyzing the socio-political dynamics and class struggles depicted in the plays, highlighting the material conditions that influence societal issues like corruption, and power abuse. Other Contemporary Playwrights like Wole Soyinka, also utilize satire to critique the political landscape, reflecting Marx's ideas on how material realities shape consciousness and social relations in Nigeria. To this degree, we will examine the Marxist spirit in the works of Femi Osofisan in critique societal ills and political issues in Nigeria.

Karl Marx, recognized as the pioneering figure behind the global movement of Marxism, initially faced dismissal of his ideas as irrelevant. However, his concepts have repeatedly resurfaced over time, confronting the peculiar, unjust, and exploitative characteristics of the capitalist system.

To address these capitalist inclinations, Marx's ideas were formalized into a comprehensive body of work known as Marxism. For those aiming to steer the world toward socialism, Marxist principles serve as an essential and undeniable instrument and weapon, aiding the working class in their fight to transform society.

These theoretical perspective will thus provide a framework for understanding how Osofisan's plays function as works of political satire, how they engage with Nigerian sociopolitical realities, and how they contribute to the broader landscape of postcolonial African literature.

1.8 Structure of the Project:

This project is organized into five chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction – Provides an overview of the study, including the background, research objectives, and significance.

Chapter 2: Literature Review – Reviews existing scholarship on political satire, Nigerian theatre, Marxism and other works by Osofisan.

Chapter 3: Textual Analysis of the plays – Offers an in-Depth scrutinization of the plays, identifying elements of Satire in the Language, Characters and Themes.

Chapter 4: Comparative Analysis of the plays "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once upon Four Robbers" – Providing a detailed examination of both plays' Marxist Ideals, satirical elements and sociopolitical themes.

Chapter 5: Summary and Conclusion – Summarizes the findings, discusses the observations and implications, and suggests areas for future research.

This structure allows for a comprehensive examination of each play individually, followed by a comparative analysis that draws broader conclusions about Osofisan's use of political satire and its significance in Nigerian theatre.

In conclusion, this study aims to provide a thorough analysis of political satire in Femi Osofisan's "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers," contributing to our understanding of how theatre can function as a tool for social critique and political engagement in postcolonial African contexts.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.0 PREAMBLE:

Engaging in a comprehensive literature review provides researchers with the means to present and critique the scholarly contributions within their domain, clarifying both accomplishments and unresolved questions. Consequently, this study will concentrate on three core themes: the sociopolitical context of political satire in Nigerian theatre, Femi Osofisan's Marxist-inspired principles as reflected in his works, and the thematic analysis of his plays that champion social transformation and critique systemic inequities..

2.1 THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL SATIRE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN THEATRE

Political satire, a potent subset of satirical literature, employs humor, irony, exaggeration, and ridicule to criticize and expose the follies and corruption within political systems and societal structures. In the context of contemporary Nigerian theatre, political satire serves as a mirror reflecting the complex sociopolitical realities of the nation. The etymology of 'satire', derived from the Latin 'satur' and 'lanx satura', meaning "full dish of various fruits", aptly describes the multifaceted nature of this literary device in Nigerian drama.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary (2005), satire is "a way of criticizing a person, an idea or an institution in which you use humor to show their faults

or weaknesses". In the Nigerian theatrical landscape, this definition takes on added significance as playwrights weaponized humor to lampoon political figures and institutions. The Complete English Language Companion (2007) further elucidates satire as "a literary work in which folly or evil in people's behavior are held up to ridicule", a description that resonates strongly with the Nigerian political satirist's mission.

In the vibrant world of contemporary Nigerian theatre, political satire serves multiple crucial purposes:

1. To expose and criticize endemic corruption and abuse of power in Nigerian politics
2. To provoke thought and inspire civic engagement among the Nigerian populace
3. To entertain while delivering scathing commentary on Nigeria's sociopolitical landscape
4. To challenge established political norms and institutions in post-colonial Nigeria

2.1.1 HORATIAN SATIRE

Named after the Roman satirist Horace, this type of satire, when applied to Nigerian political theatre, is characterized by a gentler, more light-hearted approach. It playfully ridicules the foibles of Nigerian politicians and the absurdities of the political system through mild humor. Horatian satire in Nigerian drama aims to heal societal issues with laughter rather than vitriol, evoking wry smiles from audiences while subtly teaching important lessons about civic responsibility and political awareness.

In the Nigerian context, Horatian satire might gently mock the grandiose promises of politicians during election seasons or humorously highlight the dis-connect between political elites and the common people.

2.1.2 JUVENALIAN SATIRE

Named after the Roman satirist Juvenal, this type of satire is more prevalent in Nigerian political drama due to the often dire sociopolitical circumstances it addresses. Juvenalian satire in Nigerian theatre is characterized by its contemptuous and abrasive tone. It harshly criticizes corrupt political structures, public figures, and governmental organizations. Nigerian playwrights employing this form use biting sarcasm and caustic irony to attack their subjects, aiming to provoke change through moral indignation and public outcry.

In the Nigerian political landscape, Juvenalian satire might ferociously attack corruption scandals, human rights abuses, or the mismanagement of national resources.

2.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF POLITICAL SATIRE IN NIGERIAN THEATRE

Political satire in Nigerian theatre has roots that extend back to the pre-colonial era, where oral traditions, including folklore and masquerade performances, played a central role in addressing social and political concerns. These performances functioned as a communal mirror, using humor and storytelling to critique societal structures, leadership failings, and moral conduct (Beier, 1966). Through satire, communities maintained a

balance, addressing grievances indirectly yet effectively in ways that promoted social harmony and accountability.

The arrival of colonialism and Nigeria's subsequent struggle for independence marked a transformative period for Nigerian theatre. Playwrights such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and Hubert Ogunde emerged, each employing satire to highlight the ills of colonial rule and, later, post-colonial governance. Their works, rich in allegory and biting commentary, brought to light issues like corruption, oppression, and the failure of leadership. Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, for example, humorously critiques religious hypocrisy, while *The Man Died* unpacks the dangers of authoritarianism (Soyinka, 1972). Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, on the other hand, adapts Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* to expose themes of cultural determinism and political manipulation, illustrating the complexity of Nigeria's socio-political landscape (Rotimi, 1971).

The examination of political satire within contemporary Nigerian theatre reveals a rich tapestry of artistic expression that serves as both a mirror and a catalyst for societal reflection and change. (Enemona, 2015) posits that satirical art has emerged as a potent medium of expression, capable of stirring laughter while simultaneously conveying profound messages that resonate with the populace. This dual function of satire not only entertains but also mobilizes the audience towards action concerning pressing state matters.

The historical context of satirical genres in Nigeria, traces back to the founding fathers of the Nigerian art scene, who utilized these forms to critique colonialism and other national issues. Moreover, (Enemona, 2015) emphasizes the transformative power of satire in altering public perception and behavior regarding societal issues. The ability of satire to expose human deficiencies and societal absurdities is underscored, positioning it as a vital tool for dissent, particularly in oppressive political climates. This foundational understanding of satire as a vehicle for social commentary sets the stage for a deeper analysis of specific works within Nigerian theatre, such as Femi Osofisan's "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers." By contextualizing these plays within the broader spectrum of satirical art forms, the review will elucidate how Osofisan employs satire not merely for entertainment but as a strategic instrument for political critique and societal engagement.

The literature on satirical art in Nigeria, particularly through (Enemona, 2015) insights, underscores the importance of satire as an influential medium that not only reflects societal realities but also encourages active participation in political discourse. This perspective will guide the subsequent analysis of Osofisan's works, revealing the intricate dynamics between art, politics, and public consciousness in contemporary Nigerian theatre.

In contemporary contexts, political satire continues to be a relevant and influential form of expression. It is often found in various media, including literature, theatre, television, and digital platforms. Satire's effectiveness lies in its ability to engage audiences through humor while simultaneously delivering poignant and critical messages about societal issues.

Femi Osofisan, building upon this tradition, infused his works with satirical elements that reflect Nigeria's post-independence struggles, using theatrical innovation to blend African performance traditions with modern themes. His plays, like those of his predecessors, do not merely entertain; they educate, using satire as a tool to critique social injustices. By reinterpreting Nigerian folklore and infusing it with socio-political themes, Osofisan addresses contemporary issues while respecting cultural roots, a practice that makes his works resonant and timeless (Bamikunle, 1995).

2.2 POLITICAL SATIRE IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S WORKS

Femi Osofisan, now a towering figure in contemporary Nigerian theatre, has masterfully employed political satire in his plays to comment on Nigeria's sociopolitical realities. Two of his works stand out as exemplars of political satire:

1. "Who's Afraid of Solarin?" (1978): This play is a tour de force of political satire, loosely based on the real-life figure of Tai Solarin, a renowned Nigerian educator and social critic. Osofisan uses this work to satirize corruption in Nigerian local government, exposing the absurdities of political posturing and the lengths to which corrupt officials

will go to maintain their power. The play's title itself is a satirical jab, suggesting the fear that honest critics like Solarin instill in corrupt politicians.

2. "Once Upon Four Robbers" (1980): In this play, Osofisan employs a more complex form of political satire. While ostensibly about armed robbery, the play serves as an allegory for the state of the Nigerian nation. The 'robbers' can be seen as representing corrupt politicians who steal from the public coffers. Through this satirical lens, Osofisan critiques the systemic corruption that plagues Nigerian society and the harsh punishments meted out to petty criminals while political 'robbers' go free.

These works exemplify how Osofisan uses both Horatian and Juvenalian satirical techniques to reflect on Nigeria's sociopolitical realities. His use of humor and wit serves not merely to entertain, but to provoke deep reflection on the state of Nigerian politics and society.

In conclusion, political satire in contemporary Nigerian theatre, as epitomized by Femi Osofisan's works, serves as a powerful tool for social commentary and political criticism. By using humor and wit to reflect on sociopolitical realities, playwrights like Osofisan contribute significantly to political discourse in Nigeria, encouraging audiences to think critically about their political system and their role within it.

2.2.1 MARXISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE:

This section commences by establishing the role of literature, especially theatre, as a catalyst for socioeconomic and political transformation. The poet or writer serves as the driving force behind this movement, acting as a voice for the collective. As George Thompson articulates, the poet's role extends beyond self-expression, embodying the struggles and aspirations of their community. Their work challenges oppressive structures, inspires critical reflection, and fosters solidarity, thereby contributing to societal progress. By amplifying marginalized voices and critiquing systemic inequities, literature becomes a tool for advocating justice and driving change. George Thompson further 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".

The writer holds a prestigious role in society, acting as a key agent and innovator driving social transformation. Over time, numerous intellectuals, including Hegel, Marx, Engels, Aristotle, Shakespeare, and others, have leveraged their literary influence to confront oppressive regimes, challenging systemic exploitation and inspiring movements for liberation and societal progress. Through their works, these writers have illuminated injustices, galvanized public awareness, and paved the way for reforms aimed at dismantling authoritarian control and fostering equitable social structures.

In his contributions to Marxist aesthetics, Lenin posits that literature should not prioritize material gains for the populace. Instead, artists, particularly writers, must collaborate with progressives to champion the proletariat's struggle, steering the direction of revolutionary endeavors. Lenin's intent underscores that literature's purpose lies in confronting systemic societal issues, not commercial exploitation. Societies today grapple with pervasive problems like systemic injustice, corruption, financial embezzlement, oppression, exploitation, privatization of public assets, and residual capitalist exploitation—issues Marx condemned and sought to dismantle. These class-driven injustices, perpetuated by dominant elites against marginalized groups, are particularly entrenched in Africa and other Third World nations, where economic and political inequities persist.

Maxwell A. E. Okoli challenges the enduring misconception that literature lacks the power to drive social progress, dismissing the reduction of writers to mere impresarios. He notes that since the eighteenth century, such perceptions have evolved significantly. Okoli asserts that great writers transcend their roles as creators, emerging as architects of societal advancement. They embody the spirit of social reformers, visionaries, and revolutionaries who rouse humanity from complacency and subjugation, liberating individuals from the grip of oppressive traditions, rigid religious dogmas, ideological rigidity, and authoritarian regimes. Their mission is to shatter the chains of systemic exploitation and inspire collective action toward emancipation and equity.

The writer serves as a guiding beacon for humanity, steering transformative revolutions that elevate society toward greater resilience, wisdom, and progressive ideals. Drawing parallels to Prometheus, Okoli declares, 'the writer is prepared to hand fire to men.' Literature has consistently acted as a potent catalyst for addressing societal grievances, emerging as a formidable instrument for cultural metamorphosis that ignites revolutionary movements.

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.” Brecht emphasizes that artists seeking to impact society must abandon commercialized stages and engage directly with communities eager for societal transformation, as noted by Saint Gbilekaa (44).

Marxism, as a philosophical framework, champions the working class’s fight to dismantle capitalist exploitation and achieve social liberation. Similarly, within Marxist ideology, art is positioned as a collaborative force in this revolutionary struggle. To advance this cause, writers must demonstrate unwavering dedication and a profound connection to their mission. Reflecting on this, Chinua Achebe asserts that, “commitment means attachment to particular social aims and the use of his writing to advance social aims” This suggests the conviction that literature possesses the inherent capacity and ought to be employed as a catalyst for societal transformation, with writers bearing the moral duty to wield it purposefully, as he stressed.

In the ongoing pursuit of a society that is both improved and more humane, M.A.E. Okoli elaborates 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”.

Against this backdrop, writers reflect societal realities and guide individuals toward specific thought and action. To evoke the combative potential of writing and underscore the pivotal role of authors and literature in sparking and sustaining revolutions, Balzac, likening himself to Napoleon Bonaparte, asserted, 'he would accomplish with the pen, what Napoleon started with the sword (Literature and Social Change: The Instance of French Revolution.

The writer, particularly Nigerian writers, must not only understand their surroundings—their immediate community—but also, as Emmanuel Obiechina states, “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.”

Obiechina emphasizes that a writer must demonstrate unwavering loyalty to Nigeria’s marginalized groups, including the socially disadvantaged, women, children, the unemployed, the ill, and those unable to advocate for themselves. They must actively oppose systemic oppression, brutality, and unjust violence targeting the populace. Writers

should vocally challenge national hypocrisy, particularly figures who feign patriotism while exploiting public resources for personal gain. Furthermore, they ought to champion a robust, dynamic, and life-affirming culture by resisting decadence, the manipulation of values, the decline of cultural institutions, and the erosion of traditional lifestyles through their creative work.

The written word wields immense transformative power, as evidenced by its role in liberating numerous nations, particularly in Africa, from the oppressive grip of colonial domination. Visionary African leaders—such as Nnamdi Azikiwe (Nigeria), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), Julius Nyerere (Tanzania), Patrice Lumumba (Zaire), Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana), Léopold Sédar Senghor (Senegal), and Félix Houphouët-Boigny—harnessed the pen’s influence during their formative years to champion national pride and resist colonial subjugation. Their incisive editorials and polemical writings accelerated the retreat of imperial powers from Africa’s political sphere, dismantling colonial structures through intellectual resistance.

The press has been wielded as a pivotal tool in advancing liberation movements, evolving from a political instrument into an organizational mechanism for building resistance networks, ultimately playing a critical role in securing independence. Protest themes, rather than mere news dissemination, have historically defined the African press.

The pen, and by extension the writer, possesses transformative power to shape societal destiny, acting as a vanguard against systemic injustices, tyranny, oppression,

religious extremism, and political authoritarianism. Okoli highlights the pen's dual-edged nature, stating, 'the pen, a heroic emblem of resilience and unwavering will, can disseminate enlightenment or incite chaos, depending on its wielder's intent.'

He posits that writers, like Femi Osofisan have the ability to channel societal grievances and aspirations into revolutionary action, leveraging literature as a medium for liberation or domination, reconstruction or ruin. For Okoli, the writer is both architect and artisan of ideas, crafting narratives that evoke joy, stir emotions, inspire dreams, or provoke dissent. Through their synergy, the writer and the pen actualize Marxist revolutionary ideals, as seen in societies where marginalized groups, long exploited and excluded from societal wealth, have risen in armed revolt against ruling elites, exposing the fragility of class-based civilizations through their uprising.

2.2.2 SURVEY OF OSOFISAN'S LITERARY CORPUS

Femi Osofisan, a prolific playwright and scholar, is celebrated for his sophisticated use of satire to critique Nigeria's political and social landscape. His works are marked by an intertextual richness, blending traditional Yoruba folklore, myths, and rituals with contemporary themes. This fusion serves to link past and present, allowing audiences to see how historical issues of oppression and corruption reverberate in contemporary Nigeria (Osofisan, 2001).

Osofisan's *Morountodun* reflects his approach to satire, reimagining historical events like the Agbekoya revolt through the lens of contemporary social justice. By

dramatizing these issues, Osofisan invites audiences to reflect on themes of resistance, community, and the enduring fight for justice. Similarly, *The Chattering and the Song* critiques Nigeria's political elite, portraying characters who are morally compromised and driven by self-interest. By weaving humor and traditional Yoruba performance forms into his narratives, Osofisan makes his critiques accessible and compelling, encouraging his audience to consider the possibilities of societal change (Dunton, 1992).

Femi Osofisan has contributed significantly to Nigerian and African literature through his diverse body of work. His oeuvre includes:

1. Plays:

- "Midnight Hotel" (1982)
- "Morountodun" (1983)
- "Who's Afraid of Solarin?" (1978)
- "Once Upon Four Robbers" (1980)
- "Women of Owu" (2006)

2. Novels:

- "Kolera Kolej" (1975)
- "Cordelia" (1989)

3. Poetry:

- "Minted Coins" (1988)
- "Dream Seeker on Divining Chain" (1993)

2.3 PREVIOUS STUDIES ON WHO IS AFRAID OF SOLARIN? AND ONCE UPON FOUR ROBBERS:

Scholars have examined Osofisan's plays *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*, focusing on their engagement with political and moral issues. Who

is *Afraid of Solarin?* employs the character of Tai Solarin to criticize societal corruption and the loss of moral integrity, presenting Solarin as a relatable figure whose outspoken nature highlights the compromises that power often demands (Awodiya, 1993). In doing so, Osofisan not only immortalizes Solarin's ideals but uses satire to question contemporary moral standards.

Similarly, *Once Upon Four Robbers* tackles the socioeconomic conditions that push individuals into crime, framing the robbers not merely as villains but as victims of systemic injustices. Scholars praise Osofisan's nuanced portrayal, noting how his use of satire prompts audiences to consider broader social dynamics rather than simply condemning the characters' actions (Ukala, 2001). This layered approach has made *Once Upon Four Robbers* a significant work in African theatre, illustrating the potential of satire to foster empathy and critique socio-economic inequality.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Preamble:

This chapter outlines the methodology employed in this study, providing a detailed account of the research design, data collection methods, analytical framework, and ethical considerations. The methodology ensures a rigorous and systematic approach to analyzing Femi Osofisan's plays, "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers," with a focus on their role in contemporary Nigerian political satire. Through a qualitative approach that combines textual analysis, audience reception studies, and a robust analytical framework, this study seeks to understand how Osofisan employs satire as a tool for socio-political critique.

3.2 Research Design:

The study adopts a qualitative research design, ideal for capturing the nuanced interplay of language, satire, and thematic depth within these plays. This design comprises two main components: textual analysis, which delves into the structure and content of the plays, and audience reception study, which provides insight into how these works are perceived and interpreted within Nigeria's socio-political landscape.

3.2.1 Textual Analysis:

Textual analysis serves as the primary method, allowing for an in-depth examination of "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers." This

analysis considers dialogue, character dynamics, and symbols to reveal how Osofisan uses satire to critique societal structures and address themes such as corruption, injustice, and the abuse of power. By breaking down how he constructs humor and irony, the study illustrates how satire both entertains and provokes critical thought, encouraging audiences to reflect on Nigeria's political realities.

3.2.2 Audience Reception Study

To complement textual analysis, an audience reception study gathers data on how these plays have resonated with Nigerian audiences. This aspect is critical, given Nigerian theatre's interactive nature, where audiences often engage emotionally and intellectually with the performance. The reception study will examine feedback from theatre-goers and online platforms to understand how satire shapes public perception, especially around socio-political issues like governance and social justice.

3.3 Data Collection Methods:

Data for this study is collected through primary sources (the plays themselves) and secondary sources that provide scholarly and contextual insights.

3.4 Primary Sources:

The primary sources are the texts of "Who is Afraid of Solarin?" and "Once Upon Four Robbers," carefully analyzed for their use of satire. This close reading explores how Osofisan's choice of language, structure, and character arcs fosters a layered critique of Nigeria's political and social landscape.

3.4.1 Secondary Sources:

Secondary sources include academic critiques, interviews with Osofisan, and critical reviews that offer broader perspectives on Nigerian theatre and satire. Scholarly articles provide analyses on Osofisan's work and the themes prevalent in Nigerian drama, while interviews with the playwright reveal his motivations and the socio-political intentions behind his satirical style. Reviews and responses to the plays give insight into their impact on audiences, reflecting on how these works resonate within a society contending with similar issues of corruption and power dynamics.

3.5 Audience Reception Data:

To deepen understanding of audience responses, this study conducts interviews and analyzes online discussions. The interviews, designed as semi-structured conversations with Nigerian theatregoers, examine participants' interpretations, emotional reactions, and perspectives on the political messages within the plays. Additionally, social media reviews and discussions allow for an exploration of contemporary reactions, revealing public engagement and sentiment on the socio-political issues raised in these works.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS

4.1 An Overview

The two plays by Femi Osofisan selected for this analysis—*Once Upon Four Robbers* (1982) and *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* (1978)—undergo a comparative examination to assess the extent of Marxist elements embedded within them. Among Nigeria’s literary figures, Osofisan’s works have garnered significant scholarly attention, particularly because they emerged during a period when Marxist aesthetics became a dominant discourse across social, economic, and political domains globally.

Like other intellectuals both locally and internationally, Osofisan embraced Marxist ideology and reoriented his dramatic works to align with the prevailing intellectual climate. This thematic alignment, as Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu notes, spurred ‘critical analyses that framed his plays as quintessential examples of revolutionary theatre.’ Yet, this study aims to scrutinize and evaluate the authenticity of Marxist ideals in these plays, questioning whether they fully adhere to Marxist principles or merely borrow superficial elements.

4.2 *Once Upon Four Robbers:*

In striving to develop revolutionary theatre, the playwright superficially addressed critical aspects such as character development, thematic symbolism, and the ideological

depth of his works. These omissions are evident not only in *Once Upon Four Robbers* but also in *Morountodun* and *Who is Afraid of Solarin?*

In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the protagonist-robbers exhibit psychological traits that clash with their revolutionary ideals, raising doubts about their ability to withstand the challenges of societal transformation—a concern echoed by Wole Soyinka. For example, the robbers (Alhaja, Hasan, Angola, Major) symbolize marginalized individuals exploited by systemic poverty, while the market women epitomize the corrupt, materialistic elite driven by greed and excess.

Regrettably, the robbers, who engage in egregious and self-serving criminal acts, are depicted as revolutionary champions seeking to overthrow a corrupt system through violence. While Muyiwa P. Awodiya characterizes them as ‘victims of extreme poverty driven to crime by societal opulence, systemic corruption, and bureaucratic incompetence,’ their actions mirror the very exploitation they accused the establishment for—exemplifying the adage ‘the pot calling the kettle black.’

The assertion of the robbers that desperation is what fuels their crimes rings hollow, given that many others endure the same oppressive conditions without resorting to violence. Major’s claim of targeting only the wealthy—‘we are honest, we steal only from the rich’—is indefensible, as the rich also face hardships, and such justifications do not absolve their crimes. This hypocrisy is evident when they attempt to rob Aafa, a destitute preacher, undermining their professed principles. Aafa perceives them as driven

by greed, ambition, and arrogance, using crime to compensate for their lack of education. Despite pledging to abandon robbery after their encounter with him, they relapse, attacking and robbing both impoverished and affluent market women, revealing their revolutionary rhetoric as hollow.

In *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the characters lack clear differentiation between ruling and working classes, a hallmark of Marxist critiques, as all interactions occur within the same social stratum—no figures explicitly align with the establishment. Dialogues predominantly occur between market women and robbers, both implicitly categorized as members of the laboring class. Both groups share a singular, ethnocentric goal: escaping systemic poverty perpetuated by indifferent, corrupt leadership that enriches elites while impoverishing the masses.

Though the robbers criticize the market women (portrayed as establishment figures) for their ostentatious lifestyles, they themselves squander stolen wealth on frivolous extravagance rather than uplifting marginalized communities, as seen in Major's aspirations for lavish, wasteful indulgence.

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...

The playwright's choice of radical protagonists (armed robbers) undermined the Marxist ethos of the play, as these characters ultimately sabotaged the very societal goals they initially sought to pursue. Their actions were driven by self-interest rather than the collective struggle endorsed by Marxist principles. Consequently, scholars contend that the heroes in Sowande and Osofisan's works are neither morally superior nor more devoted to societal welfare than the oppressive forces they oppose.

Furthermore, in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Osofisan fails to provide a definitive vision of which faction the future will favor. As Uche-Chinemere Nwaozuzu observes, "the play is preoccupied with themes that leave its characters haunted by past traumas, entangled in cycles of violence, mortality, and shattered aspirations."

4.3 *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*

Who is Afraid of Solarin? merges Yoruba cultural traditions with Nikolai Gogol's *The Inspector General*, reimagining both to critique Nigerian corruption. Drawing from Yoruba folklore, Osofisan transforms the communal fear of smallpox—historically personified as Sopono, a deity invoked to curb epidemics—into a metaphor for societal dread of Dr. Tai Solarin, an incorruptible figure symbolizing moral accountability. The play also adapts Gogol's satirical style, using farcical humor to expose systemic graft among Nigeria's political elite. When faced with Solarin's impending investigation, six corrupt councilors consult Baba Fawomi, an Ifa priest, to invoke Orunmila, the deity of wisdom, in a desperate bid to evade scrutiny and shield their illicit activities from

exposure. By blending traditional beliefs with modern political satire, Osofisan critiques how cultural practices are exploited to perpetuate corruption while highlighting the tension between ethical governance and self-serving power structures.

In contrast to *Morountodun* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* features comedic characters rather than revolutionary figures, such as Isola, Baba Fawomi, and Pastor Nebuchadnezzah Ifagbemi, who exploit their roles for personal and commercial gain. Baba Fawomi, an Ifa priest, is portrayed as a religious fraud who feigns expertise in Ifa divination, exemplifying the play's satire on hypocrisy and greed. His exaggerated rituals and opportunistic behavior underscore the critique of spiritual leaders who prioritize profit over integrity, a theme central to the play's comedic yet critical tone. He is also shown to be a self-serving charlatan who pretends to have a vast knowledge of the divination processes of Ifa 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.”

Baba Fawomi also capitalizes on the community's devout faith in Orunmila, deceitfully extracting excessive quantities of food items from the councilors under the guise of sacrificial requirements for Ifa rituals. Addressing the councilors, he stated:

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.

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.

Pastor Nebuchadnezzah Ifagbemi, another pivotal character, abandons his sacred role as a divine servant to seek protection from the deity Orunmila, thereby compromising his religious integrity. This transformation results in a hypocritical, corrupt figure who neglects his spiritual duties, thus undermining the Marxist revolutionary aesthetics the playwright aims to achieve. Similarly, Isola Oriebora, lacking revolutionary ideals, assumes the role of a fraudster and deceiver. By impersonating the Public Complaints Commissioner, he exploits the councilors' corruption, defrauding them of their illicit wealth instead of holding them accountable for systemic malfeasance.

The character's dubious actions stand in stark contrast to Tai Solarin's steadfast integrity as the Public Complaints Commissioner, who is revered for his uprightness and

incorruptibility. This ambiguity makes it challenging to discern the playwright's intended purpose behind this narrative twist, thereby leaving the audience to question the underlying message. The councilors, burdened by guilt from their corrupt and embezzlement activities within the council, meticulously planned how to bribe the Commissioner in order to secure his silence and ensure their continued control over the council's affairs, unaware that they were dealing with an impostor.

“COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: He'll be more amenable to private arrangements than. 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.”

Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* is populated with characters driven by personal greed, selfish ambitions, and commercial interests to enrich themselves, diverging sharply from Marxist principles that prioritize collective struggle. Instead of championing collective interests—a cornerstone of Marxist ideology—they engage in self-serving pursuits.

The sole radical figure, the genuine Public Complaints Commissioner (Dr. Tai Solarin), feared by the corrupt councilors for his integrity and incorruptibility, makes a brief appearance at the play's conclusion, after which his fate remains unresolved. Consequently, the transformative potential expected of this character to instigate significant change within the council is entirely absent, rendering his role ineffectual and the prospect of revolution unattainable.

The Public Complaints Commissioner's appearance at this juncture contributes to a thematic fixation in the play, leaving the audience uncertain about the playwright's intentions. This creates a problem with character identity and renders the play highly ambiguous.

In *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*, we encounter a materialistic pastor who not only arranges his daughter's marriage for financial gain but also wears charms to deceive and exploit his victims.

Similarly, the four robbers in *Once Upon Four Robbers* grapple with evading capture during their operations, prompting them to consult Aafa, a Muslim-Ifa priest, who helps them harness magical powers to commit robberies undetected.

4.3.1 Analysis:

In analyzing Femi Osofisan's *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*, several key research texts provide valuable insights into the plays' use of political satire, Marxist critique, and cultural hybridity. These texts not only support the claims made in this chapter but also offer deeper context and analysis.

Firstly, the application of dialectical materialism as a theoretical framework is reinforced by its role in Marxist literary theory. According to a study on dialectical materialism in literature, this approach examines how material conditions and class conflicts shape literary works, providing tools for ideological critique and class analysis . This aligns with the methodology's focus on using dialectical materialism to analyze Osofisan's critique of sociopolitical realities. For instance, in *Who is Afraid of Solarin?*, the corrupt councilors' exploitation of power reflects the materialist analysis of class hierarchies and economic systems.

Secondly, the historical context of Nigerian theatre underscores the significance of Osofisan's work. A Britannica article highlights that Nigerian theatre emerged from a blend of folklore, satire, and historical tragedy, often addressing modern social issues

through traditional performance styles. This contextualizes Osofisan's use of Yoruba cultural elements in *Who is Afraid of Solarin?*, such as the invocation of Orunmila, the god of wisdom, to critique systemic corruption .

Thirdly, Marxist theory in literary criticism emphasizes that literature reflects and critiques socio-economic conditions. A resource on Marxist literary theory notes that literature embodies social struggles, even if these tensions are concealed or resolved ideologically. This supports the analysis of Osofisan's plays as tools for social critique, particularly in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, where the robbers' actions critique systemic injustice while also highlighting their personal flaws.

Lastly, a study on the limitations of Marxist ideals in Osofisan's plays argues that his works extend beyond Marxist critique to include cultural rebirth through animist materialism, a spiritual practice that infuses natural objects with life-force. This perspective enriches the analysis of cultural hybridity in Osofisan's work, showing how he blends traditional African spirituality with modern political critique. For example, in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, the robbers consult Aafa, a Muslim-Ifa priest, to gain magical protection, reflecting the fusion of traditional and modern elements.

4.4 THEMATIC CONCERNS IN OSOFISAN'S WORKS

Femi Osofisan's works often address:

1. Corruption in Nigerian society
2. Political and social injustice

3. The role of women in nation-building
4. The interplay between tradition and modernity
5. The use of myth and history to comment on contemporary issues

4.5 THE ROLE OF HUMOR AND WIT IN POLITICAL COMMENTARY:

Humor and wit are indispensable to political satire, particularly in volatile contexts where direct criticism can be met with resistance or repression. By cloaking criticism in humor, playwrights can convey contentious messages that might otherwise provoke backlash. In Nigeria, where authoritarian regimes have historically suppressed dissent, humor has often been a shield, allowing artists to navigate sensitive topics indirectly (Obafemi, 1996).

In Nigerian theatre, humor frequently functions as a means of exposing the absurdity of power structures. Playwrights use it not only to soften their critiques but to bond with their audiences, creating a shared sense of resilience amid political adversity. Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*, for example, uses satire to question the morality of religious leaders, subtly calling out their hypocrisy while eliciting laughter from the audience (Soyinka, 1964). Through humor, the audience can confront uncomfortable truths, reflecting on the societal flaws in a way that feels communal rather than confrontational.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

This research critically examines Femi Osofisan's dramatic works—*Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*—to assess how they employ political satire as a vehicle for Marxist critique. By analyzing the plays' use of humor, irony, and allegory, the study evaluates their alignment with Marxist principles, particularly in challenging systemic corruption, social inequality, and oppressive power structures. While Osofisan is celebrated as a multifaceted artist—playwright, poet, actor, and director—this analysis focuses on his role in leveraging satire to expose societal ills and advocate for revolutionary change, thereby positioning his works within the broader discourse of political theatre in Nigeria.

The themes of Femi Osofisan's plays, including *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* and *Once Upon* revolutionary depth to his plays that may prioritize individual critique over systemic analysis. For instance, his use of satire to expose corruption often focuses on individual flaws rather than class struggle, diverging from orthodox Marxist critiques.

Additionally, his aesthetic approach, though theoretically grounded in social critique, occasionally prioritizes dramatic effect over ideological rigor, leading to a nuanced yet incomplete engagement with Marxist revolutionary ideals. *Four Robbers*, address themes such as injustice, corruption, oppression, self-reliance, and revolution,

often using political satire to critique systemic inequities. While he is recognized as a Marxist playwright, his works exhibit limitations in fully aligning with Marxist principles. Scholars sometimes overstate his commitment to Marxist aesthetics, attributing

A further limitation in Osofisan's works is the focus on intra-class dialogue, which undermines the portrayal of class struggle by failing to engage opposing social forces. Marxist theory emphasizes conflict between distinct classes—the oppressors and the oppressed—yet in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, interactions occur solely within the working class, as both the market vendors and robbers represent the same socio-economic group, thereby neglecting the inter-class dynamics central to revolutionary critique.

His plays Femi Osofisan's plays, such as *Who is Afraid of Solarin?* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*, employ political satire to critique systemic corruption and social inequity, yet their effectiveness as Marxist critiques is tempered by structural limitations. While his use of humor, allegory, and indirect critique effectively satirizes societal ills, the intra-class dialogue in these works—where characters like market vendors and robbers belong to the same marginalized group—undermines the inter-class conflict central to Marxist revolutionary aesthetics.

This focus on collective characterization, rooted in Brechtian principles, prioritizes social critique over individual agency, diluting the clarity of class struggle. For instance, *Morountodun* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* lack clear antagonists from the dominant

class, rendering their critiques of oppression more symbolic than actionable. Consequently, Osofisan's satire, though impactful in exposing systemic flaws, often prioritizes moral ambiguity and societal reflection over the direct revolutionary call-to-action typical of orthodox Marxist theatre, highlighting a tension between aesthetic nuance and ideological rigor.

In his other works, for example in *Morountodun*, Osofisan reinterprets myth and history to critique contemporary political oppression, injustice, and corruption in Nigeria. By reworking the legendary tale of Moremi, he constructs a narrative where Aristocratic Titubi, motivated by government agent Salami, infiltrates peasant communities as a spy, initially embodying a modern-day Moremi. However, upon witnessing peasant suffering, she rejects her bourgeois roots and aligns with their cause, marking a dramatic ideological shift.

This narrative twist undermines Marxist revolutionary aesthetics, which prioritize class struggle and collective action over individual transformation. Titubi's personal redemption contrasts with Marxist doctrine, which emphasizes systemic conflict between oppressors and the oppressed. Critics like Dapo Adelugba argue this limitation renders Osofisan's works proto-Marxian, as his reliance on intertextual borrowing and mythological reimagining prioritizes aesthetic nuance over ideological rigor. While Osofisan critiques systemic inequities through satire, his focus on individual moral

awakening rather than class-based revolution dilutes the revolutionary potential central to Marxist theatre, highlighting a tension between artistic creativity and ideological fidelity.

5.2 Conclusion

The extent to which Femi Osofisan incorporates Marxist ideology, principles, and practices into his dramatic works forms the core of this analysis. While Karl Heinrich Marx (1818-1883) is the namesake of Marxism, the philosophy existed before his time, with Marx himself elevating and popularizing its principles. Marxism emerged as a response to the need to challenge oppressive and exploitative systems that have historically dispossessed and marginalized the masses for the benefit of a privileged few. Marx recognized the inherent dialectical conflict between classes, whether between lords and serfs in feudal times or capitalists and workers in his era. This struggle often culminated in societal revolution or mutual destruction. As Andrew Butler notes, during Marx's time, workers were treated as mere cogs in a machine, exploited for profit and discarded when no longer useful, leading to their alienation from their labor.

The injustices Marx fought against persist today, particularly in Third World countries, where exploitation, corruption, embezzlement, and systemic oppression remain rampant. Issues such as the mismanagement of public resources, irregular payment of salaries, and the embezzlement of funds meant for retired workers are widespread. Marxism, therefore, serves as a framework to empower the marginalized and challenge the status quo.

Femi Osofisan shares Marx's vision of an egalitarian society, advocating for the inherent rights of every individual to life, freedom, and the means to sustain it. He believes that inequality, as practiced in Nigeria, is unsustainable and that progress requires collective action rather than divine intervention.

Osofisan asserts that laborers should reap the fruits of their work and opposes the exploitation of others for personal gain. According to Muyiwa P. Awodiya, Osofisan's plays are revolutionary, proposing radical alternatives to existing social orders and using literature as a tool for social transformation.

However, this study challenges the notion that Osofisan's plays fully adhere to Marxist ideology. An analysis of *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Morountodun*, and *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* reveals instances where the playwright either falls short of or contradicts Marxist principles. This contrasts with the common perception that his works are entirely Marxist in nature.

5.3 Recommendations

This study underscores the need for further research to address the limitations identified in Femi Osofisan's application of humor, satire, wit and Marxist ideology in his plays. Future scholars should explore the intersection of cultural hybridity in Nigerian theatre, particularly how traditional African spirituality and folklore can be decontextualized to reinforce revolutionary ideals. Additionally, empirical studies on

audience reception and performance history could provide deeper insights into the social impact of Osofisan's works.

These resources therefore offers theoretical frameworks and empirical analyses to guide future inquiries into political satire, Marxism, and social critique in previous or contemporary African theatre.

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