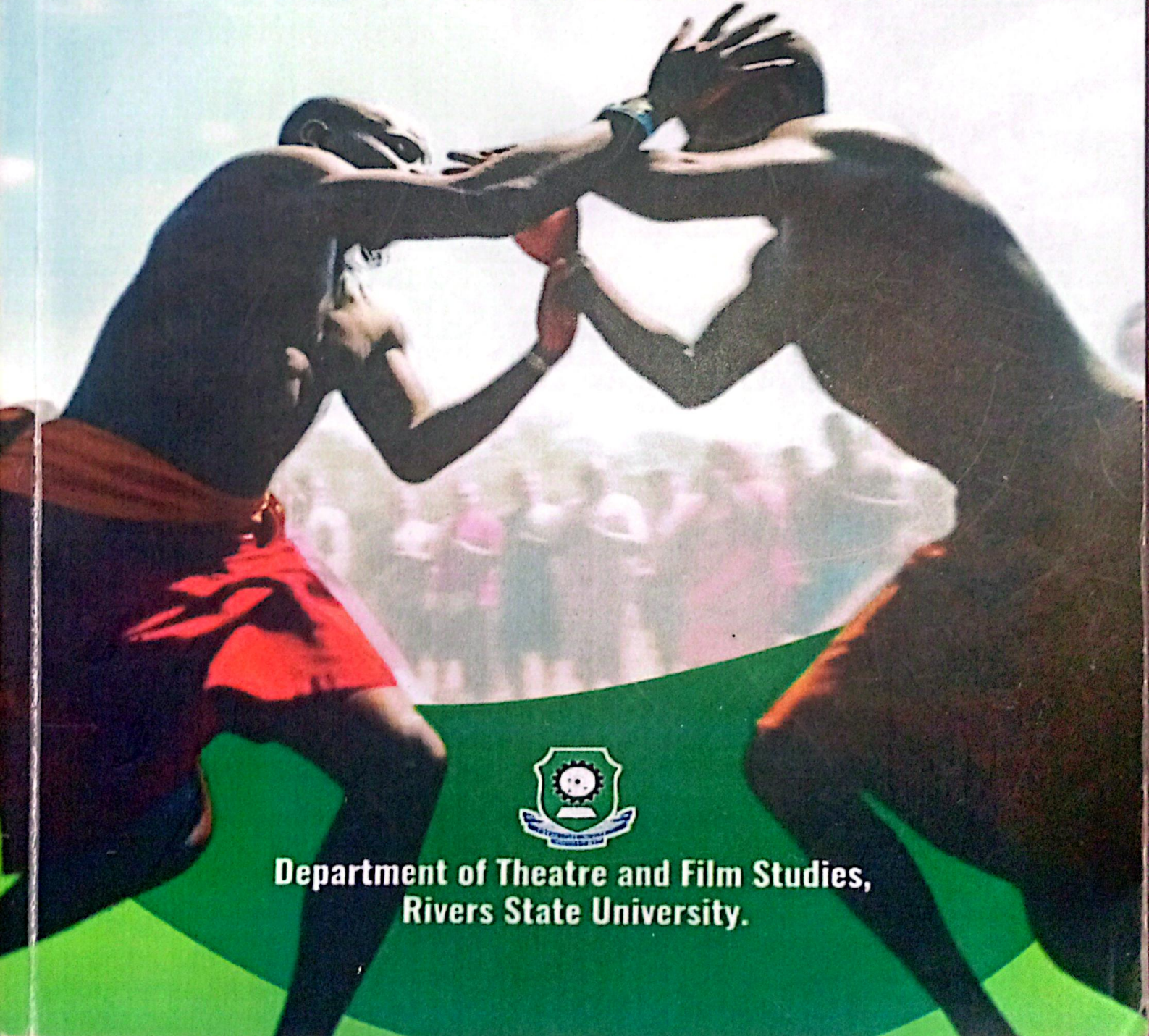


JANUARY 2025, VOL 2

ISSN:

ELEGBAKNA

Journal of Theatre and Film Studies



Department of Theatre and Film Studies,
Rivers State University.

ELEGBAKNA

JOURNAL OF THEATRE AND FILM STUDIES

JANUARY 2025, Vol. 2



AN AFFILIATE OF
DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE AND FILM STUDIES,
RIVERS STATE UNIVERSITY.

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January 2025, Vol. 2

ISSN:

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Published By:

Theatre and Film Studies Department,
Faculty of Humanities, Rivers State University,
Nkpolu-Oroworokwu, Port Harcourt.

Printed By:

Emu Integrated Services Ltd.
No. 18 Nnewi, Behind Urualla Street,
Opp. Mount Zion Light House, Mile 1, Diobu,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State.
Tel: 08038858029, 08079985674
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UNRAVELING THE THREADS OF CHANGE: NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *ONE LEGEND, MANY SEASONS*

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Abstract

Nigeria's society is currently faced with social vices such as corruption, oppression, exploitation, and financial crimes among others. The government of Nigeria has formulated many strategies to curb these social vices but all to no avail. This paper made an in-depth analysis of Femi Osofisan's drama: One Legend, Many Seasons as catalysts for personal and societal change. Focusing on the theme, this paper examines how the characters in One Legend, Many Seasons contribute to altering perceptions and promoting self-awareness. The aim of this study is to analyse Femi Osofisan's drama: One Legend, Many Seasons, as an agent of personal and societal change. Specifically, the objectives of this study are: to explore how some characters in the play contribute to their own disillusionment and the backwardness of society; to examine the use of drama as a tool for social change, and to discuss how drama provides solutions to social problems, thereby serving as a catalyst for change. The qualitative research design was adopted in the work as data was collected using the content analysis method. The study adopted Bertolt Brecht's Epic Theatre as the theoretical framework. This is because the thrust of Epic Theatre is to re-awaken the consciousness of the audience towards making the desirable change in the society. The major findings reaffirm that drama is uniquely equipped to interrogate and unravel nascent and salient issues confronting any society, thereby bringing about the necessary changes. The study recommends that the play be performed in different places for people to see in order to bring about the desirable changes.

Keyword: Change, corruption, oppression, exploitation and social ills

Introduction

Among the genres of literature, drama holds a distinguished place owing to its remarkable contributions to the enrichment of moral character and the advancement of national interests. This exceptional uniqueness can be traced back to its impressive and rich tapestry array of stories, each woven from threads conveying valuable moral and social insights. The deep traditional and cultural values, customs, and artistic configurations of a different era (pre-colonial ways of life, colonial experience, post-colonial predicaments) and present problems in different sphere of life in the society

gives a rich source of materials for significant play.

In the past, there was an argument against the utilitarian function of drama as some are of the school of thought that "art is for art's sake". This school of thought believes that art does not have any social relevance. The other school of thought believes that drama has a utilitarian function in society, that is, drama is not only for entertainment but also has the power to instigate social change. In addition, the formalist school of thought which is the Aristotelian and Hegelian aesthetic is a school of thought who is associated with the capitalist ideology, in the sense that it enforces the ideology of the ruling class or wealthy class. For example, in *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, the spectators are meant to believe that their class and fate are determined by the gods, and any attempt to change it by one will be invoking the wrath of the gods and that tragedy only befalls the aristocrats.

The radicalists on the other hand who are socialists believe in the utilitarian function of drama, in the sense that drama can be used to change the world. This school of thought is based on Marxist Theory. Marxism is a set of political and economic theory founded by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel in order to lay the foundation of socialism, that there are conflicts in human society and conflicts arise from the faults in the mode of production in which one class comes to gain ownership and control of the means of production, that is; land, buildings, machinery, capital, etc. thereby forcing the other class to work for them based on the terms and conditions dictated by them. That the conflict can only be resolved by overthrowing capitalism, placing all means of social production under social ownership and control, enforcing universal labour, and ensuring the full development of forces of production.

It is on this premise that the socialist playwright like Gbilekaa Saint in *Radical Theatre* opines that "the socialist-realist therefore identifies in the proletariat potentials for the destruction of capitalism. The defeat of capitalism would enhance the growth of a classless society and an unlimited development of humanity" (64). This means that the quest for societal change has been with the dramatists for a long time. Brecht's plays, Boal's works, Osofisan's Plays, Sowande's plays, and many others are good examples. The socialists are often referred to as leftists because they are always against the social order which is capitalism. Drama which is creative and sometimes a fictional piece of artwork is drawn from the gamut of material around the playwright. This is due to the fact that the dramatist does not create out of the vacuum but from his environment; meaning the dramatist reflects his or her environment through the piece of art by identifying with individuals, societies, cultures, etc.

Drama functions as an agent of change by mirroring society as an expression of the artist's perception of his society. Society on the other hand emphasises social relations and influences among people. It suggests how people's lives are organised and conducted within their circle. Structurally, every society is meant to operate within a certain social order and it is this order that makes human behaviour in the society predictable. This order, therefore, becomes the parameter that defines the kind of relationship that exists within the component units of such society, thus, resulting in an

increasing tendency to always count on people most of the time to meet the expectations of others. This means that through drama, social issues like corruption, oppression, infidelity, injustice, and class relations, among others, are expressed. These issues are treated to reflect and change the evident ills in society to facilitate the emancipation of the people.

Furthermore, drama is a change agent because it communicates. It is a means whereby the playwright expresses himself on an issue or issues he wishes to address, so as to communicate his ideology or views on certain social issues, ills, or vices in order to correct and bring about the desirable change. In addition, the playwright is able to give insights to the audience to think or feel through the use of dramatic aesthetics and devices.

Drama also transmits culture due to the fact that "art" signifies and identifies societies and individuals. Art plays a major aspect of culture; culture being the totality of a way of life that characterises a society. This means that as a social phenomenon, drama is concrete in its origin, as it uses a particular culture and tradition of a group of people to communicate its message, hence, transmitting the culture. Drama does not only transmit culture for the sake of upholding the culture but it points out some of the traditions or cultures that are destructive to members of the society, thereby serving as a change agent.

Meanwhile, drama as a piece of art interrogates social vices, situations, or even the status quo. It presents issues through the medium of storytelling by actors to the audience. It presents strands of relationships that exist in the society, the complexities, the hierarchies, the situations, the existing laws, the oppression, and so on for mediation and bringing changes to the society. This is because when it is presented to the audience, they watch, reflect on the issues, and strive towards desirable social change. With the aid of selected play, which is *One Legend, Many Seasons* by Femi Osofisan, the utilitarian function of drama as a change agent is discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The research work is anchored on Brechtian Epic theatre. Epic Theatre is a theatrical and dramatic concept developed by German playwright and poet Bertolt Brecht in the early 20th century. It represents a departure from traditional theatre, aiming to engage the audience intellectually, emotionally, and socially, rather than simply immersing them in a fictional narrative. The term "epic" here doesn't refer to a grand, heroic story, but rather to its contrast with traditional "dramatic" theatre.

Key Elements of Epic Theatre include:

1. Alienation effect (*verfremdungseffekt*): Also known as the "A-effect" or "estrangement effect," this is a central concept in Epic Theatre. Brecht aimed to break the audience's emotional identification with the characters by using various techniques to make the familiar unfamiliar. This encourages the audience to think critically about the events on stage rather than becoming emotionally swept up in the story.
2. Historification: Brecht often set his plays in historical or distant contexts to distance

the audience from the immediate emotions of the characters. This encourages viewers to consider the events in a broader societal and historical context, prompting reflection on the parallels to their own time.

3. **Didactic and Social Critique:** Epic Theatre frequently carries didactic elements, aiming to educate and provoke critical thought. Brecht wanted his plays to raise questions about social, political, and ethical issues, motivating audiences to think about the underlying causes of events rather than just their surface appearance.

4. **Montage and Fragmentation:** Instead of presenting a linear narrative, Brecht often used non-chronological storytelling and fragmented scenes. This approach disrupts the traditional flow of the story and encourages audiences to actively engage in piecing together the narrative themselves.

Direct Address and Commentary: Characters in Epic Theatre might directly address the audience, breaking the fourth wall. They might provide commentary on the events, offering insights, perspectives, or even contradictory interpretations.

5. **Minimalist Staging:** Brecht preferred minimalistic sets and props to avoid creating an overly immersive environment. This choice reinforced the idea that the audience was watching a constructed representation rather than a seamless reality.

Synopsis of Femi Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons*

Femi Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons* is an adaptation of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (1843), a play that centres on Alwolodu's personality whose social being is arranged around his material life. Alwolodu, although with a humble beginning is stingy despite his wealth. The play with a season setting of the Christmas period begins in an office where Alwolodu shares with his late partner, Makon. Alwolodu is indifferent to the season which is normally characterised by happiness and sharing of gifts. He is extremely mean not only to his nephew Rotimi but also to his clerk, Dedeke. He does the same to poor people as revealed in his conversation with two philanthropists who seek his financial support for the common people during Christmas. Surprisingly, this character is surrounded with an aura of love as disposed of by his clerk, Dedeke, and family and his nephew—Rotimi but Alwolodu repays them with wickedness. This meanness is further revealed as he pays Dedeke a salary of less than a hundred naira, is reluctant to grant him a Christmas holiday, insists he resumes early on Boxing Day, and fails to allow him to leave early on Christmas eve. He is also aware of Dedeke's sick child but does not do anything about it. To Alwolodu, the poor must remain poor, never happy, and even be annihilated.

Alwolodu is taken through a transformative tour involving supernatural characters and spiritual cleansing through the subversion of reality. The dramaturgy is woven with a spiritual journey guided by three mystical beings (ghosts) namely: Osetura (Spirit of Christmas past), Orekelewa (Spirit of Christmas present), and Orisanla (Spirit of Christmas yet to come) to complete Alwolodu's transformation from evil to good. Earlier, Makon's ghost (Alwolodu's late partner at work) visited to inform him of the agonies he—Makon—is passing through because of his wicked life on earth, for

Alowolodu to avoid such after his demise; he must receive the three ghosts. Osetura, the spirit of the Christmas past takes us into Alowolodu's past, revealing his humble background and how people have extended love to him in the past, especially during Christmas. A view of his choice of loneliness from his childhood days is unraveled on a certain Christmas in a lone mud building, roofed with corrugated iron, most of which had turned brown with rust. The walls were cracked, the windows broken and the few doors were swung loose from their hinges. Though Alowolodu is saddened by the reminiscence and wishes to turn back the hands of the clock according to Spirit of Christmas Past it is "too late" (22). He is further taken in the spirit to Pa Olasore's office where he served his apprenticeship. The spirit makes him see the kind attitude of Pa Olasore during Christmas to his staff as he allows them early on Christmas Eve with a party, Alowolodu becomes excited and wishes to dance and wine with the people but is stopped by Osetura noting, that was his past. Going through his past, Alowolodu becomes remorseful and determined to change. Similarly, the spirits of Christmas present and Christmas yet to come both show Alowolodu his present life and what will happen to him if he dies in his wicked and miserly attitude to life. This marks a turning point in the life of Alowolodu as he wakes from his spiritual journey on Christmas day, full of thanks that he has time to make things right.

Treatment of theme in Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons*

Redemption voyage

Alowolodun, despite his humble beginnings, has become excessively frugal and miserly, despising the spirit of Christmas as a frivolous waste of time and resources. He shows no enthusiasm for the festive season, which embodies love, kindness, and generosity. Instead, Alowolodun is portrayed as remarkably stingy, treating not only outsiders but also his own family members with contempt. His callousness is further exposed in his conversation with two philanthropists who seek his financial support for the less fortunate during Christmas. According to the philanthropists, these impoverished individuals are "several workers that have lost their jobs, armies of school leavers who roam the streets, unemployed, unfed, unclothed and homeless children" (8). But to their surprise, Alowolodu who is expected to identify with common people's sufferings because of his humble beginning referred them to the government saying:

Alowolodu: But we have a government, don't we? Answer! Why is it Mr Alowolodu who must feed the hungry... if you can't make your government work and face up to its responsibilities, why is it Mr Alowolodu who must now pay for the negligence? And then all these charity homes, what are they there for? I don't spend money making myself happy at Christmas, and I don't get desperate because of that. So why should anyone especially if they haven't got money? Besides I already pay taxes (9).

At the height of his fuming outrage with the Philanthropists, Alowolodu expresses his

wish for total annihilation of the poor. In his reaction to their request for fund to avoid the death of the poor, Alowolodu asserts:

Alowolodu: that if they (the poor) die, the number of the poor will go down, and the city will become cleaner and safer. And people like you will no doubt find more responsible business to do (10).

Surprisingly, Alowolodu is surrounded by love as disposes of his clerk, Dedeke, and his family and his nephew—Rotimi but Alowolodu repays them with the opposite. This meanness is further revealed as he pays Dedeke a salary of less than a hundred naira, is reluctant to grant him Christmas holiday, insists he resumes early on Boxing Day and fails to allow him to leave early on Christmas eve. He is also aware of Dedeke's sick child but does not do anything about it. This meanness is further revealed in his conversation with his nephew Rotimi when Alowolodu says:

Alowolodu: The world is going mad, I pay this stupid clerk of mine less than a hundred naira per week, hardly enough to feed himself and his family. And yet there he is saying 'A happy Christmas! That is why I blame the government! It doesn't starve the citizens enough! All this SAP nonsense! What we really need instead is GRIEF and SUFFERING! SORROW, TEARS AND BLOOD, as the musician put it! Maybe then we'll all learn to be sober! (7).

Alowolodu's mindset is that the poor are destined to remain impoverished, miserable, and ultimately, eradicated. Through Alowolodu's character, Osofisan critiques the societal attitude of disdain and indifference towards the poor. Alowolodu's ingratitude, despite his own humble origins, highlights the unsettling reality that a person's background does not necessarily determine their compassion or kindness. In fact, many individuals who rise to positions of power and influence often exhibit cruel tendencies, despite having emerged from humble beginnings.

Alowolodu is taken through a transformative voyage involving supernatural characters and spiritual cleansing through the subversion of reality. Osofisan as an African playwright knows the importance that is attached to those invisible elements within African cosmology. As such, the dramaturgy is laced with a spiritual odyssey conveyed by the three supernatural beings (ghosts) namely: Osetura (Spirit of Christmas past), Orekelewa (Spirit of Christmas present), and Orisanla (Spirit of Christmas yet to come) to complete Alowolodu's transformation from evil to good. Earlier, Makon's ghost (Alowolodu's late partner at work) visited to inform him of the agonies he—Makon—is passing through because of his wickedness while on earth and that for Alowolodu to avoid such at his demise; he must receive the three ghosts. Osetura, the spirit of Christmas past takes us into Alowolodu's past, revealing his poor background and how people have extended love to him in the past especially during Christmas. A panorama of his choice of loneliness from his childhood days is unveiled on a certain Christmas in a:

Long mud building, roofed with corrugated iron, most of which had turned brown with rust. The walls were cracked, the windows broken

and the few doors were swung loose from their hinges... Everywhere was covered with dirt and dust, with cobwebs and the droppings of lizards. Since the beginning of the Christmas holidays, no one had come to the school. No one, that is, but a lonely, little boy...there the boy was all alone, forgotten by his friends (21-22).

Though Alowolodu is saddened by the reminiscence and wishes to turn back the hands of the clock according to Spirit of Christmas Past it is "too late" (22). He is further taken in the spirit to Pa Olasore's office where he served his apprenticeship. The spirit makes him relive the kind attitude of Pa Olasore during Christmas to his staff as he releases them early on Christmas Eve with a party:

OLASORE: Hello boys! No more work today! It's Christmas, Kola! Ebenezer (Alowolodu)... let's close the office...Now let's begin! Call everybody! Tell my wife and her friends to bring in the food and the drinks! And set up the music. It's Christmas! (24)

Alowolodu becomes happy and wants to dance and wine with the people but is stopped by Osetura noting, that was his past. Looking through his past, Alowolodu becomes remorseful and determines to change. Similarly, the spirits of Christmas present and Christmas yet to come both show Alowolodu his present life and what will happen to him if he dies in his wicked life. This marks a turning point in the life of Alowolodu as he wakes from his spiritual journey on Christmas day, full of gratitude that he has time to make amends:

Alowolodu: What! It's Christmas day! I've not missed it! My God! My God! So those spirits all came in one night! Ah thank you, God, for giving me this chance! I'm going to change my life! (56)

Alowolodu has the opportunity to change from his wicked ways but Makon doesn't. Makon is just like the Biblical character of the rich man that did not care for the poor like Lazarus while on earth, the rich man died in his wicked ways and went to hell fire but had concern for his family members on earth not to follow his ways and end up in pain like him. Makon equally shows the attitude of repentance although when it is already late and is also compassionate by not wanting his friend to end in pain like him. Alowolodu's humble background did not make him a better person until he encounters the spirits.

Social Context of *One Legend, Many Seasons*

Femi Osofisan's play, "One Legend, Many Seasons", offers a somber commentary on the detrimental effects of the common people's actions and inactions on the nation's progress. Osofisan skillfully employs various dramatic devices, including characterization, audience participation, plot, narrative technique, entertainment, and the didactic purpose of folktales.

The play features the Tortoise, a traditional carrier of African oral folklore and philosophy, as the protagonist in the nested story "The Tale of Ijapa the Tortoise and Eliri the Mouse". Osofisan's incorporation of folklore serves a crucial thematic purpose,

as it reveals the true nature of the protagonist, Alowolodu, whose attitude towards the common people is shockingly reprehensible.

Through the folktale, Osofisan conveys a moral lesson to Alowolodu, who distances himself from the positive endeavours of the society. Despite his humble beginnings, Alowolodu betrays the trust of the common people by accumulating wealth through wicked means, inflicting suffering on his staff and relatives. He despises the Christmas season, symbolizing generosity and joy, and shows contempt for the poor, even advocating for their eradication.

Alowolodu's character parallels that of Eliri, who, despite having a small ear, shirks his responsibility to society with an anti-community attitude. In contrast, Ijapa, the Tortoise, is praised for his selfless contributions to his community, despite his physical limitations. The animals' judgment serves as a commentary on the importance of community involvement and social responsibility:

For even if his ears were tiny, were they not still ears? If he was not out to cheat, he should still have cut a little part of it and brought it as instructed, but the Oba and the elders finally decided that some other punishment than death should be given Eliri. So, they put an eternal curse on him that henceforth, none of his offspring would ever grow big, but would always be smaller than other animals (51).

In "One Legend, Many Seasons", Femi Osofisan emphasizes the importance of community involvement and social responsibility. He concludes that individuals should actively contribute to the betterment of their community, stating, "we should put our hands into it, and try our best"

(51). Osofisan warns that selfishness and isolationism are detrimental, asserting, "The habit of doing my own-*apart* does not become a good person!" (52).

As Akporobaro Frederick notes, "the crafty, the selfish, and evil characters in folktales never go scot-free at the end" (105). This fate befalls Eliri, the mouse, who is cursed for his refusal to help his community. Similarly, Alowolodu's transformation from malevolence to benevolence serves as a testament to the power of community spirit. Through the play, Osofisan seeks to revive the traditional community spirit, which has been eroded over time. He emphasizes that this spirit is essential for stemming the tide of wickedness and national failure. By deploying elements of folktales in a subversive manner, Osofisan satirizes the common people's often-idealized role in national development.

The play's central metaphor highlights the crucial role individuals play in societal development through integrity, loyalty, and patriotism. Osofisan's message is clear: the common person's actions, or lack thereof, significantly impact the community's progress, and it is essential for individuals to reevaluate their responsibilities and contributions to society. There is also no rest for the unrepented evildoer even after death as seen in the character of Makon. Makon roams about in pain and chains noting:

That is what still binds me to earth. It's the chain I made for myself

when I was alive. The chain of not-caring. Of loving only oneself. It is a chain that comes when you think that making money is more important than caring about other people. But you never know this when you're alive, that you are making a chain for yourself which you will carry after you are dead... Now I have to travel many, many long distances in atonement! Aaaah!... Oh why, why? When I was alive, why did I walk past so many other people with my eyes turned down? (13-14).

For Alowolodu to not experience the same excruciating pain as his friend Makon, he has to be visited by three strange spirits. Alowolodu never sees anything wrong in his ill act toward his staff— Dedeke, whom he short pays and is not bothered about his family's welfare; The same with his cousin Rotimi whom he maltreats; changes to a nice man after seeing the implication of his wickedness. The description of wickedness in Alowolodu is appalling to the extent that he almost suffocated the Spirit of Christmas Past when he feels tired and disappointed in himself after being taken around to see his past evil life. The narrator presents the incident this way:

ALOWOLODU: Oh God! Oh God! That's enough, Sprit! Show me no more! [Reaching forward suddenly, he seizes the pointed cap and covers the spirit's head. The spirit begins to drop to the floor, with a cry. As he falls, lights die off the scene... (27)

No doubt, if Alowolodu could do this to a spirit in the spirit realm, how much more would he do in the physical? The message is lucid as Osofisan has shown that if during a process of reformation, one is caught perpetrating a greater offense, it signals such an ill act is not acquired but innate and inherent. The spirit also recalls that Alowolodu's greediness for wealth makes him remain unmarried as his erstwhile girlfriend—Aduke dumps him for lack of feelings for human beings. In her words:

ADUKE: Money isn't everything or what use is money if we have no time to enjoy it... I am worried about how this obsession with money has changed you... You will grow rich one day, I can see. But I am not sure you will still be a human being. So good-bye my darling, and good luck to you (One Legend..., 27).

With the visit of Spirit of Christmas yet to come, Osofisan presents a check on the inherent trait of wickedness in Africans. Knowing well the importance attached to those invisible elements (spirits), Osofisan launches into the future and afterlife of man as a way to correct his present. Alowolodu's sojourn into his future is the most shocking of these spiritual journey and revelations as he is made to hear what people will say about him when he dies and how his clothes and belongings will be sold. According to his neighbours after picking Alowolodu's items:

MAMA REKIA: He only cared about himself when he was alive. Why shouldn't we help ourselves with some of his things when he is dead? Will he be needing any of them now?

BABA JOJU: Oh someone had put it (his shirt) on him, and he was

going to be buried in it. Can you imagine! But I took it off him and replaced it with an old one. Where he's going I am sure he won't be worrying about elegance there! (56).

Alowolodu is later taken to a graveyard where he sees the Dedekes mournfully burying their handicapped child. To Alowolodu's surprise, he hears the Dedekes vowing to continually bring flowers to commemorate their late son every Sunday but a particular grave is comparatively ridiculed as lonely with no one to mourn the bearer who has all the riches while alive but was mean to people (54). Alowolodu on hearing this requests the spirit to let him have a look at the name on the gravestone of the man so described. Discovering the grave belongs to him, he breaks down. This shocking reality marks a new dawn in the life of Alowolodu as he screams to stop his bad behaviour and states his resolve to be kind and forever be humane:

ALOWOLODU: What: It's me! No! No! No! Spirit, please don't do this to me! Listen, I am no longer the man I was! I swear to you, I've changed. I can change Spirit! You know I can live a new life! I tell you now, I shall love Christmas and look forward to it, and try to think of it all year long! And every time people are rejoicing, and there is a celebration, I shall join my fellow men, and try to be happy with them! Yes! I will live in the past, the present, and the future! I will always remember the lessons that they teach! Oh please help me! Help me rub out the writing on this stone...

As this transformational journey brings a spiritual cleansing to Alowolodu, Osofisan is suggestive of an inward looking approach which is futuristic in examination of realities in drama. This he believes will present a holistic way in addressing backwardness in the society. The audience and reader infer this work as the narrator concludes that Alowolodu who is happy to wake on Christmas day from his spiritual sojourn quickly begins to right his wrongs. He increases the salary of Dedeke, goes to church, sings on Christmas, sends a big ram to Rotimi's family (his cousin) and gives the Philanthropists he once derides a sumptuous amount of money to take care of the needy. The narrator explains further that:

He became a good friend and master. He became the best old man that the city knew. Some people laughed at him, but he didn't care, because he was happy in his own heart. People said he knew how to enjoy Christmas and other festivals better than any other man that lived (65).

The skillful presentation of *One Legend, Many Seasons* which leaves room for a change in behaviour of the principal character—Alowolodu is very significant to the thematic concern of this work as Osofisan ideologically presents that though man is instinctively wicked, he also has the tendency to change if he is confronted with the reality of the implication of his ill actions. The narrator puts it this way when he concludes that:

NARRATOR: Let it be a lesson to all of us, so we can live a happy and prosperous life. For there is an Alowolodu in all of us, whom we

must expel (66)

Conclusion

The deployment of social issues in a subversive manner to create an awareness campaign for the liberation of the soul of the wicked people in the society in Osofisan's *One Legend, Many Seasons* prove drama as a mediator and change agent in the society. Despite the inherent challenges associated with drama, drama if well utilized has the power to create positive changes in society by fighting against social vices. Osofisan in the plays under study is not out to crucify the whole society but preoccupied with changing them from bad to good. As such, a character changes among those doing evil in the play to prove that the expected change is possible among the evildoers. In sum, attitudinal change towards human relationship in the society is what Femi Osofisan envision in the text as the panacea for societal ills.

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