



MARXIST CRAFTSMANSHIP IN NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF OLU OBAFEMI'S *SUICIDE SYNDROME* AND OLA ROTIMI'S *IF...*

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Abstract

*This paper examines the deployment of Marxist aesthetics and ideology in Nigerian drama through a critical study of Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled*. It examines how both playwrights employ Marxist aesthetics to expose class contradictions, systemic oppression, and the failures of postcolonial leadership. Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* presents a trenchant commentary on intellectual disillusionment and the socio-political betrayal of the masses, while *IF...* dramatizes the complicity of traditional institutions in perpetuating neo-colonial oppression. The study reveals that both plays, though stylistically distinct, embody a deliberate Marxist aesthetics that foregrounds the agency of the oppressed and call for socio-political transformation. Ultimately, the paper underscores the role of drama as a tool for ideological resistance and a medium for articulating revolutionary consciousness within Nigerian society. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to knowledge on how Nigerian dramatists adapt and localize Marxist aesthetics to reflect indigenous socio-political realities. The study recommends that Nigerian playwrights and artists should continue to create socially committed works that expose contradictions within society and amplify the voices of the marginalized.*

Keywords: Nigerian Drama, Marxist Aesthetics, Revolutionary Consciousness, Oppression, Injustice, suicide.

Introduction

Marxism according to Gbilekaa, "is a philosophy of praxis which aims at the radical transformation of human reality based on a dialectical interpretation of history," (40). The aim is to destroy capitalism in order to establish a society in which humanity can give free rein to its essential powers, frustrated, denied, postponed and emasculated for long" (Eagleton 3). Marxist ideology has provided fertile ground for critical engagement in postcolonial African literature, especially drama. Nigerian dramatists have over the decades, engaged with Marxist themes as both an aesthetic strategy and a tool of political engagement, interrogating the power dynamics, class struggles, and socio-political dysfunctions that characterize postcolonial Nigerian society. Among these dramatists, Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi, stand out for their nuanced and ideologically charged portrayals of systemic exploitation, leadership betrayal, and the possibilities of revolutionary consciousness. Although Marxist theory originated in 19th-century Europe, its relevance in African literary expression lies in its capacity to unveil the exploitative structures perpetuated by local elites and foreign capitalists. The Marxists stand steadfastly with the oppressed people--the proletariat. Some of the notable Marxist writers in Nigeria include: Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Kole Omotoso, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi, Festus Iyayi, Ola Rotimi and Emeka Nwabueze among others. We are concerned in this work however, with Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled*. Both plays critique the bourgeois class that rose to power after independence, exposing the ways in which it continues to exploit the masses.

Commenting on the current economic and socio-political situation in Nigeria, Akinwande et al, observe that "the political challenges before the working and poor people, have become more sensitive than ever before (82). They further lament that the capitalist political class has severely



plundered the substantial potentials of the nation, while the poor continue to live in abject poverty. Similarly, Ribadu, laments the fact that Nigeria, the world's eighth largest exporter of crude oil, still has more than 70 percent of its population living below the poverty line, as a result of corruption and economic mismanagement. He asserts with disappointment that:

The unpardonable failure of the political leadership class, managing the affairs and wealth of the country had inevitably brought severe misery to many voiceless and helpless Nigerians. Nigeria post-independence political bureaucratic and military elites had terribly pillaged the nation's common wealth and national patrimony with impunity, thereby denying Nigerians access to economic prosperity and quality living condition. The development assistance fund of about \$400 billion that flowed into the country for socio-economic development between independence and the collapse of military dictatorship in 1999 was atrociously squandered by the political leaders of the period (Ribadu 4)

This paper examines how these plays exemplify Marxist craftsmanship, blending local aesthetics with global ideological concerns to challenge hegemonic structures and advocate for change. More specifically, the study will examine how Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF...* have critiqued the bourgeois class that replaced the colonial masters after independence.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that foregrounds this work is the Marxist theory propounded by Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels (1976). The theory is used to explain a popular philosophical movement of the nineteenth century. Marxism is a materialistic doctrine resting on an economic base. As a doctrine, Marxism divides the society into two: the bourgeoisie (the capital holding class), and the proletariat (the wage earners). The doctrine argues that the power relationships between the capitalists and the working class are inherently exploitative and would inevitably create class conflict which will ultimately lead to a revolution in which the working class would overthrow the capitalist class and seize control of the economy (Ogayi & Etuk 56). Marxist literary theory examines the relationship between literature and the socio-economic conditions that produce it. Central to this approach is the idea that literature reflects and can potentially reshape the material realities of the society. In the African context, Marxist criticism is often interwoven with postcolonial discourse, focusing on the operation of power, class, and ideology in most postcolonial African states.

The application of Marxist theory to African drama underscores the role of literature in raising class consciousness and inspiring resistance. Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasises that, writers must be revolutionary and align themselves with the struggles of the oppressed using art to articulate their aspirations. Marxism, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, posits that history is driven by material conditions and class struggles. Literature, from a Marxist perspective, is a reflection of social realities and an instrument for ideological resistance. The Marxist critic seeks to uncover how texts represent class relations, ideological state apparatuses and the mechanisms through which the ruling class maintains dominance.

In the context of African drama, Marxist criticism examines how playwrights depict the postcolonial bourgeoisie, who often replicate colonial structures of exploitation. African dramatists employ satire, allegory, and characterization to expose class conflicts and provoke political awareness. In *Suicide syndrome* and *IF...*, Obafemi and Rotimi utilize drama as a weapon of socio-political commentary, portraying leaders as predators who prey on their subjects thus sustaining systemic inequality.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the "craft" of Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi as Marxist dramatist .,
2. To show how form (songs, chorus, satire, episodic structure) embodies Marxist aesthetics,



3. To compare socialist-realist agitation (*Suicide Syndrome*) with tragic-demystifying critique (*If...*),
4. To situate the plays within Nigeria's socio-historical context of the 1970s–80s: a period marked by military rule, corruption, labor unrest, and disillusionment.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in textual and contextual analysis. It proceeds from the conviction, central to Marxist aesthetics, that literature cannot be separated from the material conditions of its production and reception. The methodology combines three interrelated approaches. These include: the comparative textual analysis of *Suicide Syndrome* and *If...*, the contextual analysis and critical synthesis. The plays under study are treated as literary texts whose dramaturgical devices encode ideological positions. The contextual analysis situates the plays within Nigeria's socio-political climate of the 1970s and 1980s, an era marked by military rule, corruption and oil-based capitalism. Information for this work is also drawn from books and journal articles.

Findings

The study reveals that Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *If...* exemplify the dramatist as a Marxist craftsman who consciously shapes form into ideological critique. Both plays foreground class antagonisms, yet through different modalities: Obafemi deploys socialist-realist and agit-prop strategies chorus, typification, and satirical slogans to mobilize the oppressed toward immediate collective action, while Rotimi adopts a tragic-demystifying mode that exposes how the ruled internalize passivity through the recurring "if" refrain. A shared reliance on indigenous performance traditions such as song, communal chorus, and episodic structure demonstrates how Nigerian dramatists indigenize Brechtian estrangement techniques to unmask ideology and stimulate critical awareness. However, each method has limitations: Obafemi's directness risks schematic characters, while Rotimi's tragic tone risks fatalistic pessimism. Together, the plays affirm Nigerian theatre as a revolutionary space where dramatic craft is both cultural labor and political intervention.

Analysis and Discussion

Marxism, Class Struggle and the Nigerian Dramatists

Marxism, as a critical theory, provides a lens for understanding societal structures through the dynamics of class conflict, economic determinism, and ideological control. In postcolonial societies like Nigeria, where historical exploitation and continued economic disparity persist, Marxist analysis becomes particularly relevant. Nigerian dramatists have used theatre not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a potent tool for critiquing capitalist exploitation, neocolonialism, and the betrayal of the working class by political elites.

Nigeria's post-independence era has been characterized by political instability, military dictatorship, ethnic conflict, and economic inequality. These challenges have provided fertile ground for politically engaged drama. Nigerian playwrights have responded by producing works that reflect the frustrations of the masses and critique the bourgeois class that has replaced colonial rulers with indigenous oppressors. A study of most published Nigerian plays reveals their thematic contexts as those which bear a heavy burden of reflecting the dichotomy between the "haves" and the "have nots" (Afolayan & Adeseke 11). As a result of this, the palpable gulf between the rich and the poor, upper and lower classes, is noticeable in plays like Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun*, and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Hopes of The Living Dead* and *If... A Tragedy of the Ruled* (Afolayan & Adeleke 11).



Femi Osofisan stands out as Nigeria's most overtly Marxist dramatist. His plays thematise the problems of the peasants and the working class. Viewing drama as a medium of instruction, he uses it to raise the consciousness of the masses towards the prevailing social decadence and thus move them into taking appropriate action. His plays therefore in the words of Gbilekaa, "consistently attack all forms of corruption, oppression, injustice and tyranny" (74). Osofisan thus, uses drama as a tool of social engagement and ideological confrontation. In plays like *Morountodun* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*, for instance, Osofisan adapts traditional narratives and folk forms to challenge capitalist oppression and thus promoting revolutionary consciousness. In Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* the downtrodden lepers who constitute the "have nots" give credibility to the author's commitment to social alienation as his lepers are simply regarded as socio-economic waste and aliens to their environment. Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, explore the failure of leadership and the manipulation of power. Osofisan, cited in Afolayan and Adeseke, also maintains that:

Plays like Rotimi's *If* and *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Sowande's *Cirrus of Freedom Road*, Obafemi's *Nights of the Mystical Beast*, Segun Oyekunle's *Katakata for Sufferhead*, Okediji's *Rere Run*, Soyinka's *Jero's Metamorphosis*, *Opera Wonyosi* or *The Bacchae of Euripides* and virtually all of my own works especially such pieces as *Once Upon Four Robbers*, *Another Raft*, *Aringindin...* are intended to be as much investigative rites of socio-political rebellion as they are deliberate revisions of the inherited theatrical forms on behalf of that hidden agenda (Afolayan and Adeseke, 11).

However, our major concern in this paper is to examine the deployment of Marxist craftsmanship in Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF... the tragedy of the Ruled*.

Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*

Olu Obafemi, is a respected Nigerian scholar, dramatist, poet, critic, and Professor of English. He is known for his contributions to literature and drama, particularly with themes related to social justice and African identity. Olu has published sixteen texts across the genres of drama, poetry and prose. *Suicide Syndrome*, is his third and the subject matter of the play is the exposure of the grave implications of the gross inequality in the playwright's society (Babatunde 1). The play, according to Babatunde, was published in 1988, during the regime of the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (1985-1993) particularly at the time of the austerity introduced by the administration in consistence with International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) recommendations. This period was notorious for corruption, inequity and economic marginalization of the masses. Though the play was first published more than three decades ago, the subject matter and themes are still relevant to the contemporary socio-political realities in the country.

Olu Obafemi's *Suicide syndrome*, is a compelling political drama that interrogates the moral decay and ideological disillusionment of post-independence Nigeria. As a playwright deeply rooted in Marxist aesthetics and revolutionary ideals, Obafemi presents a society where the intellectual elite have capitulated to corrupt power structures, and the dream of liberation has given way to despair. The play revolves around Professor Toriola, a disillusioned academic who once held revolutionary ideals but has become estranged from society and from himself. Haunted by the collapse of ethical values, systemic corruption, and the betrayal of post-colonial aspirations, Toriola grapples with suicidal thoughts. His personal crisis becomes symbolic of the broader societal malaise, thus serving as a critique of intellectual impotence and the moral failure of leadership in a post-colonial African nation.

Suicide Syndrome, is a psychological and political drama that foregrounds the existential dilemmas of post-colonial African elites against the backdrop of systemic economic decay and political corruption. In line with Marxist ideology, the play critiques the bourgeois class and explores how material alienation and capitalist exploitation lead to societal disintegration and personal despair. In the author's note to the text, Obafemi states:



I do not conceive *Suicide Syndrome* as a play about suicide at all. If anything, it is a rabid exposure of the symptoms of suicide, the cause; that is, neo-colonial and socio-economic order in Nigeria and other third world nations. It is a proposition of the options available to the working people, the peasantry, the unemployed but unemployable majority in these neo-colonies.

This obviously reveals that Obafemi has set out to unveil the state of deprivation and absurdities that afflict the “have-nots” in the Nigerian society where there is economic imbalance. Interestingly, the play begins as a protest against the Eurocentric symphonized theatrical form which beclouds the African realities of hazards and impoverishments.

Professor Toriola, embodies the tragic fate of the post-independence intellectual who finds himself trapped within a corrupt capitalist system he initially hoped to reform. Through Toriola's internal crisis and ultimate suicidal ideation, Obafemi exposes the alienation that Karl Marx described the separation of individuals from the products of their labour, from their humanity, and from the social systems they help perpetuate but cannot control. Despite his education and idealism, Toriola could not effect meaningful change because the structures of exploitation are deeply entrenched. He becomes a metaphor for the failure of the so-called "revolutionary" elites who have been absorbed into the oppressive apparatus they once opposed.

With the creative use of setting to establish the Marxist radical aesthetics of the play, Obafemi creates two different forms of environments in *Suicide Syndrome*. These are, the crude environment populated by the proletariat and the refined area with the bourgeoisie class. Mama and her two children are the representatives of the proletariat in the slum area. Although Mama's husband, the breadwinner of the family is working, the family can hardly feed itself. Mama's husband works diligently but unfortunately what he earns for his hard work cannot sustain his family. They live on credit. Mama, like some members of the proletariat class, hopes that all will be well with time. The playwright introduces the radical aesthetics with the outburst of Mama's son who is no longer comfortable with the socio-economic stratification in their society. The following excerpt reveals thus:

SON: I mean, Mama. You, papa, my sister and me. We are hungry and poor. And papa. He works harder than a jackal. So hard I am always afraid to look at him returning from the factory, bent-double at the back. Yet, every time they drive us home from school for not paying our school fees, not buying our books. Our uniforms are tattered and thread-bare. Me and my sister, we each have a cup of gari once a day. (Taking mama's hands, who is trying hard not to crack). Tell me mama: who is that devil that keeps us in this condition? (115)

Mama's response to her son's question is that her children are different from the bourgeoisie's children. Her response is a reflection of the passivity and resignation to the fate of proletariats in the contemporary socio-economic arrangements. Mama's characterisation in the play validates Karl Marx's idea that “religion is the opium of the masses”. She is carried away by the opium of the religion by sermonising her children to accept their problems and suffering as divine. (Azeez and Tolulope 81). In Marxist ideology, religion is the superstructure that the bourgeoisie often adopts to indoctrinate the proletariat class into the lives of suffering and wants. To Mama, asking questions about their penurious situations is a blasphemy. She reminds her children that they are children of God and for this reason, they should always be grateful to Him in all situations. She admonishes her children thus:

MAMA: (*Now playing a philosophic game*). My children. It is evil to think like that. Evil. It is not good for children of God. It will make you hate humanity. (*Suicide Syndrome*, p.116)



Ola Rotimi's *IF...*

IF... is a radically committed play. Having being inspired by the wastages and recklessness of the second Republic, Rotimi has turned his attention from historical plays to socially committed drama to unveil the suffering of the ordinary people, their aspirations, their frustrations, their feelings and the neglect and deprivation that they suffer. Rotimi tries to re-awaken the consciousness of the masses, getting them set for the task ahead. Hence, in the words of Mabel Ekwierhoma "the call for a radical re-orientation is heeded by the tenants in the building in *IF...* and the inmates of the leprosy ward in *Hopes of the Living Dead* (2)

IF... has several sub plots and themes. The asthmatic bouts of Onyema, Mama's fortieth marriage arrangement and sickness are all subplots and themes that are embedded in this drama that emphasizes the importance of unity in diversity. Closely related to the theme of solidarity is that of exploitation, positive leadership and self reliance. The theme of solidarity is built through the tenants, the poor masses described as the Chosified Ibeings. The tenants are a microcosm of the nation, each coming from a tribal nucleus that has formed the federation of Nigeria. Akpan, Chinwe and Dokubo are from the East, Mallam Garuba Kazaure and Dr. Hamidu alias Che Guevara are from the North while Banji and Betty are from the West and Mid-West respectively. In spite of their linguistic, cultural and religious differences, they have all come together as a team to fight a common enemy, their callous landlord. The Marxist Hamidu articulates this theme of solidarity in the following words:

...Solidarity. The day our solidarity dissolves is the day our humanity ends and our worthlessness begins....Nobody should be deemed useless in a struggle against oppression.

Not even our already chosified brother here— Garuba. The same goes for Betty. And you... Chinwe, and me, and all of us. Nobody is useless (*If...* 16-17).

IF... also highlights the power of the masses in rectifying a corrupt judiciary or the law courts through electoral politics. Papa articulates this view with emphatic clarity.

A forthright judiciary is a reflection of the confidence it derives from the ethics of the people. The people then are the last hope for save guarding that ethics through the kinds of persons they put in power. That is the language you must speak tomorrow. With your votes. You know the candidates... anything short of this language, any vote cast for a politician tomorrow on the basis of sheer fatherhood by birth: or of brotherhood by clan; or sisterhood by religion is your doom. Our last hope then, is in a sound government that will inspire a forthright judiciary before which we'll present our case. That's all. (*If...* 14-15).

Language Aesthetics in Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*

Obafemi's language in *Suicide Syndrome* is sharp, charged with political rhetorics and symbolism that aim to raise consciousness rather than merely entertain. The structure of the play moving between introspection, debate, and confrontation mirrors the dialectical method of Marxist theory, where contradictions are laid bare to drive social change. With the understanding that dramatic creativity goes beyond what is said, this paper adopts Marxist language ideology in the interpretation of *Suicide Syndrome*. This is because the plot and artistic verisimilitude of the play reveal its focus on Marxist ideals of radical poetics. This argument is based on the fact that the aesthetics of what is said can only be realized on the pages of the text and on-stage during performance through how the playwright has used language to attain the aesthetic and ideological visions of the play. Overtly or covertly, Marxist ideologues such as Gareth Stedman Jones in *Languages of the Class* (1983), Perry Anderson in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983), Bryan Palmer in *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (1990), Peter Ives in *The Grammar of Hegemony* (1997), *Language and Hegemony in*



Gramsci (2004) and *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (2004), Umberto Eco in *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) have critiqued the use of language to establish/deconstruct social class and hegemony. The aggregate of their views is that language is generative and advances as human consciousness of their socio-economic status grow and develop with civilization and revolution.

Olu Obafemi, one of Nigeria's famous playwrights and a contemporary of Femi Osofisan, subscribes to the above view about the power of language to delineate class differences with the presentation of his radical poetics in *Suicide Syndrome*. Though he uses English language to express his thought in the play, he reveals his bilingual competence in the use of English and Yoruba languages with his lexical choices and syntactic structures. For instance, the New Director uses English and Yoruba languages to illustrate the level of hardship that most people face in Nigeria when he says:

people turning to *kainkain* (local gin) or to cocaine,
people restituting themselves
people robbing,
people killing,
people deceiving others. (*Suicide* 112)

People rob, kill and deceive others in order to survive in a capitalist society where the worth of man is determined only by his monetary acquisition. This is further substantiated in the following authorial lines:

Ba-bu kudi Not to have money
Ba-bu duniyan is not to have audience
(In Yoruba)
Ti ko ba sowo
Ko ni seniyan
Me jalai looo (*Suicide* 112)

Supporting the above claim, Akwanya, Amechi, states that "the language use in the text was seen as embodying the unconscious signature of the author" (145). The author's unconscious signature, as found in the text, is credited to his consciousness of the inherent and explicit social malaise in the Nigerian society.

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Language Aesthetics in Rotimi's *IF...*

In Rotimi's *IF...*, language functions both as a tool of domination and resistance. The ruling elite speaks in detached, bureaucratic tones, while the subalterns use oral traditions, humor, and



metaphor to challenge authority. This linguistic dualism mirrors the ideological conflict at the heart of the play, reinforcing the Marxist premise that culture is a battleground for class struggle. The background events that provide the story is the return to civil rule in 1979. It is the eve of the voting day when all Nigerians will go to the polls to elect a civilian government. However, for the inmates of a multi-tenanted building where different tribes and classes live, it is a different story. They are threatened with quit notices from their landlord who wants to intimidate and blackmail them into voting for him in his bid to win a senatorial seat.

From the play, we find that the intellectuals comprising the lawyer, doctors and teachers who live in the multi-tenanted building were ready to educate their co-tenants on the need to remain united in solidarity so as to be able to fight their common enemy their landlord and other oppressors. They reminded the tenants the fact that once their solidarity is broken, the landlord will find it easier to deal with them on their individual capacities and defeat them. There is therefore, the need for them to work together to achieve their collective interest by voting for the candidate whom they feel will work to improve their lives (16). Thus, almost to a man, including those who are not served with the quit notices, the tenants forget their differences and come together in solidarity under the able leadership of Papa to oppose the oppressive predilection and high-handedness of their landlord. According to the retired teacher:

...we must let the landlord know that we all here are one. If because we refuse to take oaths to vote for him in the coming elections, this now is his way of punishing us, fair enough. But let him punish all of us. No exceptions. I see divide and rule tactics at work here, and we must resist them at all costs. (*If...*13).

The tenants resolve to bide for time to enable them to take the matter to court for adjudication. Meanwhile, they unanimously mandate Papa to write a strong letter to the landlord protesting against the quit notices as well as the hike in rents. All the tenants are equally advised not to pay above the usual twenty naira. Rotimi believes that to reassert their humanity the oppressed masses must be in solidarity to rescue themselves from the forces of exploitation that have long gripped them in the strangle-hold of an inguinal hernia (*If...*16). But this is dependent on several conditions predicated on the big IF. That is:

If the masses, the oppressed masses again for a change will use their votes as tools for their own freedom. If that fails, then mass-struggle becomes imperative (*If...*16).

Unfortunately, at the end of the play, the poor masses are unable to bring the desired change through the ballot box. The desire to destroy the notorious oppressive capitalist system through electoral politics has been frustrated by the very capitalists who have the muscle and the wherewithal to twist things in their favour.

In *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled*, Rotimi depicts a society teetering on the brink of revolution, where the promises of independence have been squandered by the ruling elite. The play captures the contradictions of a bourgeois class that rose from anti-colonial struggle only to replicate colonial structures of domination. The tragedy lies not only in the rulers' betrayal but also in the failure of the ruled to act collectively until the brink of collapse.

Revolutionary Praxis and the Role of the Dramatist

Drama is a veritable means of social reconstruction. Both Obafemi and Rotimi position themselves as dramatist-activists who seek to provoke social change through their art. Their plays do not merely depict social decay, they dramatize the necessity of revolutionary praxis. In the Brechtian tradition, the audience is not meant to passively consume but to actively engage, question, and transform. Obafemi's *Suicide syndrome*, is a revolutionary text that dramatizes the failure of reformist politics and gestures towards radical social transformation. Through the protagonist, Professor Toriola, Obafemi enacts a Marxist critique of post-colonial power structures while offering the possibilities of revolutionary praxis a term Paulo Freire describes as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Pedagogy of the oppressed). In this sense, *Suicide Syndrome* moves beyond despair to advocate for dialectical engagement with the world.



Suicide Syndrome represents the post-colonial intellectuals, who having once harboured revolutionary ideals, succumb to the corrupting influences of the bourgeois political class. His despair and eventual suicidal ideation reflect notion of alienation: he becomes estranged from his purpose, his community and himself *Suicide Syndrome*. Though the play ends on a note of despair, Obafemi's intention is not to glorify defeat but to illustrate the urgent need for collective revolutionary engagement. The moral collapse of the elite underscores the necessity of reimagining leadership from below. Toriola's suicide thus becomes a symbolic call to arms—a rejection of reformism and a turn towards radical change.

In *IF...*, the revolutionary pulse of the play, is built around the Marxist Hamidu. Hamidu, stirs the tenants to anger against their oppressive political and economic set up. The tenants are the poor masses described as the “Chosified beings.” The tenants are a microcosm of the nation, each coming from a tribal nucleus that has formed the federation of Nigeria. Akpan, Chinwe and Dokubo are from the East, Mallam Garuba Kazaure and Dr. Hamidualias Che Guevara are from the North while Banji and Betty are from the West and Mid-West respectively. In spite of their linguistic, cultural and religious differences, they have all come together as a team to fight a common enemy, their callous landlord. The Marxist Hamidu articulates this theme of solidarity in the following words:

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In *Suicide Syndrome*, while the play's tone is tragic, there are undercurrents of revolutionary hope, a belief that through the exposure of the system's rot, a new consciousness might arise among the oppressed. In typical Marxist fashion, Obafemi suggests that despair itself can be revolutionary, if it leads to collective awakening and action.

Conclusion

Suicide Syndrome and *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled* are exemplary works of Marxist craftsmanship in Nigerian drama. Through their incisive critique of class inequality, ideological manipulation, and postcolonial disillusionment, both plays contribute to a tradition of revolutionary theatre. Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi use the stage not just to reflect reality, but to confront it, challenge it, and ultimately, inspire its transformation. Their works reaffirm the role of drama as a vehicle for ideological resistance and social liberation in contemporary African societies.

In *Suicide Syndrome*, Obafemi dramatizes revolutionary praxis by exposing the failures of the post-colonial elites, critiquing ideological systems, and calling for the birth of a new political consciousness. In doing so, Obafemi invites his audience not to mourn, but to organize, not to retreat into despair, but to rise with purpose. Toriola's ultimate breakdown is not meant to paralyse the audience; rather, it urges them to recognise complicity, question norms, and seek alternatives.

Similarly, Rotimi exposes how ideology is weaponized to maintain the status quo. Religious and cultural narratives are manipulated to discourage resistance and justify inequality. The people are alienated not only from political power but also from the ability to see through the veil of false consciousness. However, Rotimi's dramaturgy also suggests the potential for awakening, as



disillusionment fuels critical reflection and rebellion. Both plays thus align with Marxist dramaturgy's commitment to praxis art as a catalyst for political awakening.

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