

# Unveiling the Mask of Oppression and Revolutionary Aesthetics in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender*

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**Abstract:** Revolutionary ideology has its aim in ensuring a social order in our dystopian society and negating the evils that are traceable to colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and neo-colonialism. Revolution is the most extreme but necessary social alternative to use when other avenues to achieve reform are exhausted. Most writers focus on the aesthetics of the art and not on how the art can drive societal relevance. This study expatiates on the view of revolution, and how Olu Obafemi uses his play text, *Naira Has No Gender* to reflect the aesthetics, and tendencies of revolution to sensitize his audience. Using Marxist ideology, Georg Lukacs' Reflection Model was adopted as a theoretical tool in expounding the social realities of class consciousness and struggles. The model with relevant derivatives was utilized in processing the specimen play to reflect the motivating ideology of quest for freedom in a society bedeviled by oppression and social inequality. Various African revolutionary writers have used their writings to conscientize Africans and educate them on the subject of colonialism and neocolonialism. In an ill-structured society like Nigeria and Africa as a whole, committed writers should see revolution as an instrument of change and not of violence.

**Keywords:** Revolution, Aesthetics, Tendency, Bad Governance, Oppression.

## I. Introduction

Drama, according to M.H. Abrams in his *A Glossary of Art Terms*, is defined as "a composition designed for performance in the theatre, in which actors take the role of the character, perform the indicated action and utter the written dialogue" (69). Milton also explains drama further as:

A composition, in prose or poetry, accommodated to action and intended to exhibit a picture of human life, or to depict a series of grave or humorous actions of more than ordinary interest, tending toward some striking result. It is commonly designed to be spoken and represented by actors on stage (Milton, 34).

Drama is an imitation of life; it reflects and exposes the society in various ramifications of life. That is, through drama, the society sees itself, evaluates itself, appraises itself and reinforces accepted values as well as condemns the unacceptable ones. "Drama on the other hand is a creative and expressive area of human activity which provides a powerful source of peace-building energy and passion..." (Uzaji, 22). Drama has grown not only to become a means of entertainment, but also a means by which the society is educated and corrected. The most meaningful asset that a playwright may possess is the ability to influence his followers or audience. A playwright who possesses such ability will experience utmost joy when he realizes that in one way or the other, his art makes life better. Thus, writers through their works make contributions to the growth and progress of

their community or society. The term “drama” has evolved not only to entertain and educate the people but also to correct the social decadence in the dystopian society. In view of this, this paper seeks to explore Olu Obafemi’s *Naira Has No Gender* as a protest drama, bringing out the beauty inherent in revolutionary movement, as exemplified by the playwright.

Revolution, according to F. N. Enor and J. James, is derived from the Latin word ““revolution” –a turnaround” (14). Samuel Huntington (Yeniçirak, 331) also defines it as

A radical transformation in society. “A revolution,” is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies”.

Revolution as quoted above is a process of transforming the society from a bad state to a better in a very tough way which is not an easy thing to achieve. To achieve revolution in any society, the people of such society must be ready to move away from their comfort zone and sacrifice many things even their lives because everything good cannot come on a platter of gold, that is sweat and blood must follow.

Mike Omilusi (6) also describes revolution as

an exceptional condition that achieves a specific purpose, which is fundamentally to overthrow and change the status quo with which the people are no longer satisfied. The objective of a revolution is to employ the state of popular discontent and hatred, and the poverty and oppression suffered by the people, to effect change and put an end to the sources of hardship – or, in other words, overthrow those whom the revolutionary leaders consider to be the source of this suffering.

Revolution is the most extreme but necessary societal alternative taken when other options or avenues to achieve reform have been exhausted. It is meant to arouse the consciousness of man with the revolutionary ideology. It helps man to understand and master his environment and make it to serve humanity better. However, there are other perspectives of revolution attempts that have been made by African Artists to evolve a revolutionary ideology. Nkrumah (97) says that “a revolutionary ideology is not merely negative, it is not a mere conceptual refutation of dying social order, but a positive creative theory, the guiding light of the emerging social order”.

Revolutionary ideology has its aim in ensuring a social order in our society which will negate the evils inherent in colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and neo-colonialism.

Lipps Theodor (1) defines Aesthetics as “the science of the beautiful”. Aesthetics is a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty in the work of a particular artist or artistic movement. Revolutionary aesthetics is, therefore, the form of revolution, advanced at the instance of a work of art. Many a-times African playwrights create aesthetics that recommend certain magnitude of revolution which might appear as their own resolution to peculiarize their ideology. These playwrights create this artistic scenario through a presentation of people’s drive towards a forceful overthrow of a government or social order, in favour of a new system in their desirous quest for total freedom from the shackles of oppressions. Historically, African societies have been marked with notable acts of revolts. Most of the time, the revolts were in reaction to some policies of government that were deemed inimical to the interest of the masses or that which sought to perpetuate the self-aggrandisement of the hegemonic class.

However, these revolutionary inclinations have served as a pre-text to African dramatists who distilled the experiences in fictive form. In reality, the revolutionary African drama is more often a protest against oppression, exploitation, poverty, deprivation of rights, injustice, dehumanization and other practices devised by the practitioners of colonialists and neo-colonialists as they shall be probed into in this research by exploring and evaluating Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* with a view to highlighting the revolutionary tendency, and aesthetics elements employed in the text by the playwright. This paper also seeks to achieve the following objectives: the examination of how the text under review relates to the issue of agitation as a force for change, and investigating how the playwright has used drama to educate the masses on the beauty of revolution (freedom) by using the text under review as a means of filling the gap of evaluation into the purpose of the literary work in the life of the masses.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Marxism, a radical theory that envisages a classless society, which deals with fighting and struggling for equity and egalitarianism shall be the theoretical guide for this research work. Afolayan and Ibitoye (341) explained the concept of Marxism as a theoretical approach that “originated from a radical perception of human society and its practitioners have always been viewed as radicals. This is why more often than not, Marxists are called ‘leftist’ to indicate them to be antibourgeois”. Marxism is a theory of societal radicalism that deals with class struggle between the upper class (bourgeois) and the lower class (proletariat). Marxism is portrayed to be anti-bourgeois because it has zero tolerance for oppression, exploitation, and injustice which is deemed to be inflicted on the proletariat by the bourgeois. Josiah Heyman sees Marxism as a “fundamental theoretical concepts, especially with regard to deep human history and social change, conflict, social inequality, economics, and labor” (2).

Marxism is a way to know the world, as a critique of the world, and as a means to change the world and it strictly believes in equity and egalitarianism, that is, everybody in the society should be granted equal access and right to the means of production in the society. David Forgacs (134) also sees Marxism as a “theory of economics, history, society and revolution before it has anything to do with literary theory”.

Afolayan and Ibitoye further explain Marxism as “not primarily designed for literature”, as Eglaton (342) has identified, “it is a body of theoretical work that further explicates the complex nature of and formation of individualism in society”.

Primarily, Marxism is a theory that Karl Marx advocated for political, economic and history revolution, but for the fact that all these can be found in the society, Marxist theory has found its way into literature because literature mirrors life and reflects everything in the society. Afolayan and Ibitoye (142) further state that Marxism “operates on the assumption that literature can only be properly understood with a larger framework of social reality”. There are five theoretical models as subdivided by David Forgacs in his “Marxist Literary Theory” but for the purpose of this research, Lukacs’ reflection model of Marxism shall be adopted to carry out our critical analysis on the primary text for this research work.

## III. LUKACS’ REFLECTION MODEL

Georg Lukacs’ reflection model is a model that deals with beliefs in the reflection of reality in literature. This model primarily believes in literature reflecting social realities. Forgacs (139) explains this by saying that “the result, in the case of a correctly formed work, will be that form of literature work that reflects the form of the real world”. It is believed that literature mirrors life because it shows exactly what is happening in the world; it reflects the total ways of life as Forgacs mentions that “it is not a theory of literature in general but a theory of realistic literature”.

Lukacs’ reflection model of Marxism is concerned with the class consciousness and social reality of historical condition of any society. For this reason, this reflection model shall be adopted as a model of Marxism for this research work and as a theoretical tool to bring out the social reality of class consciousness and struggle

as portrayed in the primary text. According to Marx, “It is the economic arrangement which shaped the consciousness of men in the open leading to an epoch of social revolution of change in economic production and the transformation of the entire super-structure” (7).

Remarkably, the societal atmosphere depicted by Olu Obafemi in *Naira Has No Gender* lent credence to this Marxian dialectics, for conflict in economic relations is everywhere and it is rapidly developing to a point where revolution and transformation will take place. Through the conflict and resolution in his play, it is only the proletariat of a society or the masses that are capable of bringing revolution in the society. On this note, the specimen text which is Olu Obafemi’s *Naira Has no Gender* shall lend itself to Marxian reading.

#### **IV. REVOLUTION AGAINST BAD GOVERNANCE AND CLASS STRATIFICATION IN NAIRA HAS NO GENDER**

A critical evaluation of Olu Obafemi’s *Naira Has No Gender* is carried out by exploring ways through which the playwright has exhibited revolution against bad governance and class stratification in the play text. *Naira Has No Gender* is a play that is written by the playwright as a means of giving voice to the voiceless, and a means of encouraging the oppressed masses on how to be strong in rejecting whatever they see as threats to their livelihood, source of living, fundamental human rights, social justice, etc. Through the play, *Naira Has No Gender*, Olu Obafemi uses the political, socio-economic, and trade-modern society of the Yoruba society to raise an important point affecting the common people in the country with the themes of bad governance, bad economy, bad leadership, corruption and social inequality. This is found in the author’s note thus:

I have chosen an ostensibly trivial part-domestic, part-social issue in the play to examine how conscious (socially and politically) individuals confront the reality of daily existence in a bankrupt, cynical and dysfunctional social order. Fulfillment of human aspirations (as simple as the “case of getting married”) has become a far cry from the common man – almost as “luxurious” as obtaining daily such factors as badly working a bad elections, corruption, myopia in leadership –have combined to produce anguish... (Obafemi,5)

With this play, Obafemi gears up the spirit of resistance in the masses to fight against corruption, bad governance, bad economy, socio inequality and class stratification in the society by scrutinizing” the ownership of wealth in a patriarchal, phallogocentric society such as Nigeria through vocal females” as posited by Kemi Atanda (2). Otunla who is a graduate and a poor teacher, whom Aina refers to as a “radical teacher” is in love with Aina. They both love each other as they start planning how their wedding ceremony will look like. It is in the process of planning for the wedding that Otunla comes to the realization that the wedding is a no going area for a common man like him as Aina begins to explain to him the bride price and other fees he has to pay:

AINA: Yes, thank you. Everything, from the Isakole fee to show that my old man heaped though mounds in dry times to bring me up, yes, to the Palemo rate to assist the wives in the house to wash my feet with camwood and palm oil. Otunla, you will pay the Igarun fee which will warm my parents’ heart to shower such blessings that will clear the thorning part for my graceful transition into the bullying world of husbands. Man, every kobo must be extracted from your purse... (11).

Otunla tries to protest all these fees and enlighten Aina about the danger of paying such a heavy amount of money on wedding ceremony. Olu Obafemi uses the name Otunla to symbolize the hope of the betterment of the

society in the nearest future, when the masses will understand the level at which they are being deprived of their natural fundamental human rights. Otunla tries in making Aina understand this when Aina replies him saying:

And you call yourself a teacher. You are already shitting on your pants, and I have not said anything... Have I mentioned the gown, the wedding ring, the attire of the bridal team, the ring bearer, the flower girls... The group uniforms, Asoebi down the twenty one lineage that form my ancestry? Are they to go naked because I'm marrying a radical teacher? (12)

He makes Aina realize the reasons why he cannot afford to pay such exorbitant prices for their wedding ceremony which will only last for a day, or even few hours. The objective here is to make Aina see the disadvantage of paying such a high levied rate for a wedding ceremony. Otunla explained to Aina that it can lead to abject poverty for the couple after the wedding ceremony, as the couple will start to live in penury by not having anything to survive on, because they have overspent on the wedding, which is an act of sending invitation to hunger which could be a way for "armed robbery".

Olu Obafemi through this play reveals a nation where inequality and embezzlement is the order of the day. Aina compares Otunla with Dokun, the son of Chief Awadanu, a man who gets "check before contract" (21) because they are friends. The playwright shows through this that inequality in the society is not natural. It happens as arranged by the looters who call themselves leaders, this makes Otunla explain further to Aina that he cannot live above his means:

AINA: Just see your friend and your class mate, Dokun. I saw it all. I was present at his own wedding. Everything immaculate white: flower flakes; white, champagne; white, Baby Ben wedding car; white, the sport mustang car which his father gave them as a wedding present; spotless white. Hear the mansion his father gave them for their honeymoon... I hear it is also painted white.

OTUNLA: White! White!! White!!! Stop it I say. I don't intend to start to live above my means. He comes from a rich family. I don't.

AINA: He does? How far back?

OTUNLA: What do you mean, how far back?

AINA: You know what I mean, don't you? This rich family, since when? His grandfather was a praise-singer in your grandfather's chamber

OTUNLA: ...Change the topic. You know he is one of us. Beside, his parents are contractors. They are part of the mercenary culture which we condemn, which you seems to be admiring suddenly. The culture of kick forward, kick backward and kick sideways. The culture of contracts which has ruined the dream of this land. (15)

The playwright has been able to identify that the mercenary culture is evil in nature, especially the culture of kick forward, kick backward and kick sideways which is no doubt a culture of corruption and embezzlement. This is one of the cultures militating against the salvation of the masses from the shackles of capitalism. This culture helps the minority rich to continue getting richer by accumulating more wealth through dubious means. This same culture also makes the majority poor remain in their abject poverty.

Social injustice is being revealed as one of the products of capitalism and neocolonialism in the society, as it is being portrayed in this play. People are denied justice, their civil rights. Apart from this, they are molested, maltreated and made to suffer without any offence. The dialogue that ensues between Baba and Mama in this play sheds more light on the issue of social injustice in the society:

MAMA: Night after night, they parade the market, and helped themselves to some of our goods at the close of every market. Then suddenly, they came with guns, Baba. Not the sha-ka-bu-la you used to discharge on the fleshy breast of the antelope. ...they came in jeeps and trucks with their machine guns; battle ready. It was a brutal raid –operation. They came to uproot us from the only source of our livelihood; our stalls. Like armed robbers and marauders they looted what they didn't want to destroy. All our valuable wares, gone to beautify the city. ...it was a mechanic with a shed adjacent to the market. He was made to watch his shed burnt down, razed to ashes before his very own eyes.

BABA: Chineke, God. What for? Did he kill anybody's child?

MAMA: He committed no offence. It is true what they say. The love between the neck of a cow and the sharpened edge of a knife has expired. They have thought us how to hate. We who know only love. We who from the beginning of the times have always ended our tales with hopeful songs .now we end them with a painful dirge. ...in the process, the reason for living fled from him, the shed was his only means and reason for living. They burnt it down to plant flowers with its ashes. Slowly, the mechanic threw every items of his trade into the flame. His stools and all. ...very slowly, he walked into the flames, grinning. Obviously of the heat of the embers. (41,42).

In respect of the above quotation, mama as a character has been used by the playwright to make the audience understand the pain of the masses, how their love has been turned to hatred, how life has become very difficult for them to survive, and how their happiness has always been turned to sorrow by the people of the ruling class. This is a part of the driving force of revolution as the masses protest against denial of right to survival, social injustice, and class stratification, etc. The women in the play as explained by Mama to Baba protest with an abominable thing against the government by exposing their breasts during the course of the protest which is a taboo in Yoruba land against the ruling class.

The women are able to revolt against oppression by the Government. Through this, Olu Obafemi raises a prominent point that not all revolutionary movements are bloody. Though the road to freedom might be very rough and cumbersome, but it might not necessarily lead to war whereby people will start killing each other. The peaceful demonstration of the women has been used by the playwright to explain to his audience that there can be a peaceful and non-violent revolutionary movement. Non-violent revolution as defined by United State Institute of Peace as a:

Civil resistance, contentious politics, popular defiance... Citizens involved in non-violent civic action do not challenge their opponents by using violence or the threat of violence, which are often the tools of repressive authorities.

...The technique is a realistic alternative for those who have suffered grievances. In many cases, people, groups, and societies have learned to fight for their rights, or pursue a cause, without resorting to armed struggle and violence. (4,5)

A non-violent revolution is using mostly campaigns of civil resistance to bring about the departure of government seen as anti-people and authoritarian. However, many campaign of civil resistance are intended for much more limited goals than revolution. Generally, a non-violent revolution is characterized by simultaneous advocacy of democracy, human right, and national independence in the country concerned. It is obvious that revolution is not only about violence or war which ends in bloodshed. What matters most in revolution is the ability to understand one's right and fight for it, which can either be achieved in a peaceful or violence means of resistance. None of these is easy to achieve because it requires a strong will, a lot of sacrifice, and hard working. "The protest, I hear you people are opening your breasts..." (39) as said by Baba to Mama shows that the women are able to gather and organize themselves in an orderly manner after they have realized how they have been cheated, exploited and maltreated by the government. They organize themselves into a single force to fight against oppression by showing their plight, suffering and grievances to the government, but not in battle.

Another revolutionary moment Olu Obafemi exhibits in this play centered Otunla and Aina who agreed and readiness to go against the traditional way of getting married, which can only be afforded by the rich in the community because it is too expensive for a common man. Otunla makes Aina understand by saying "I say will the couple eat after the honeymoon? I am talking of semovita, essential commodities, staple food items like rice, yam, garri. Or is wedding reception the same thing as the feast of the Passover?" (13).

With lots of words from Otunla, he struggles to make her understand the danger in running into debt as a result of wedding ceremony. Aina later realizes the truth, which was revealed in her speech when talking to Otunla by saying "stop it, Otunla. I've told you it's all over. I want you as you are. Nothing else matter. Not even my parents' demand for a traditional wedding" (17). With this statement from Aina, it is an unarguable fact that Otunla has been able to convince Aina, and now they are together in the same ideological view with one force to militate and combat against the tradition that will never allow a common man to get married in the name of trado-modern marriage ceremony. In attempts to overcome this tradition, they don not care about violating any traditional or cultural belief that has nothing to do with moral standard because they know that if they blindly follow the tradition, it will be to their own detriment and nobody will care whether they incur debt to get married or not which is just their headache and none of any other person's business. So, for this reason, the intending couple decides not to mind what anybody will think or say about them. Their concern is to kick against such tradition.

AINA: That is why I'm here Mama. (*Slowly, she kneels beside the old man, but fixing her eyes on the old woman, the target*) We; Otunla, and I, we won't be having a wedding. Not the way it is done these days (43).

This quotation tells what Aina explains to her parents concerning her wedding with Otunla. At first, the parents frown at what she says by rejecting and rebuking it. But Aina as a revolutionary character who never resigns to fate, immediately makes them see reason why she has to go against the dictates of the modern tradition on her wedding:

Baba, all the happenings that you have enumerated grow from the same root. Times are hard. Everything is turned upside down. The rhythm of our lives have been snapped. Broken by the paddlers of our fishing boat. We need now to adjust, and grip the new reality by wrist, not by the elbow. The cost of the Christian wedding rite,

added to the customary one has more than tripled. Baba, we can't afford it. It will cripple our already shaky future, our tender happiness (45).

Aina gives a salient and reasonable point here which explains that they are already in penury which already makes their future shaky and they cannot add to their problem by incurring debt to satisfy tradition in their marriage as this will totally ruin that shaky future and make them poorer. This statement of Aina makes Baba change his mind and agrees with Aina:

BABA: I don't understand this world any more. Owl have begun to hoot in broad daylight. My inner ears cannot hear anymore. They are blocked by mad sirens, carrying the sounds of hunger. Aina our daughter (*holds her hand as rolls of thundering drums go off*) just understand that we wish you well always. But the drums of the day have begun to draw our eyes with maddening thuds. And I cannot rend the language of drum anymore. Go and confront your future. But allow us to maintain the sanity of the past, and the abuse of today may pass into oblivion (46).

Otunla and Aina have their wedding ceremony in their own way in such a way that nobody has ever done thereby giving hope to the future. It is a four-man wedding, the couple and their two friends; Dokun and Debby. The major message this is passing across is the message of independence and freedom from marital hindrance and slavery of a common man. Hear Dokun:

Dokun: (*Also helping Otunla to complete the ritual*) Yes, that is an important prayer in these times when the craze for wealth has turned us into beats (*Turns to Aina, thoughtfully*) Now, Debby, let our maiden gift to our newly wedded couple suitably manifest in a story – a story which affirms the triumph of their spirit... (51).

In respect of the above quotation, Olu Obafemi has really explained what is meant by aesthetics of revolution, which is the sign of the beauty of a struggle. The major beauty of any struggle is freedom, and the playwright portrays this as Otunla and Aina earn themselves freedom from financial barrier of getting married. In many cases, the aftermath of revolution is always accompanied with happiness, music and dance. These are all found at the end of the play when Otunla and Aina (the couple), Dokun and Debby (their friends) dance and sing:

Otunla: (*They all dance and sing the nuptial dance of hope, as lights begin to fade*) Let the matting...

All: Brings the birth of a new dream for the land. (*The dance swells with the nuptial rhythms, Blackout*) (52).

## V. REVOLUTIONARY TENDENCIES IN *NAIRA HAS NO GENDER*

Obafemi in the play text *Naira Has No Gender* uses the setting of a traditional modern Yoruba society to portray the socio-political and economic system and how it affects the common man in the society. He tries to paint an unequal society that favours few individuals as he states in the author's note:

I have chosen an ostensibly trivial part-domestic, part-social issue in the play to examine how conscious (socially and politically) individuals



confront the reality of daily existence in a bankrupt, cynical and dysfunctional social order. Fulfillment of human aspirations (as simple as the “socially intricate” case of getting married) has become a far cry for the ordinary man – almost as “luxurious” as obtaining daily meals ... The real issue has been for the ordinary people, bare existence and sustenance of basic humanity (5)

In this play, Obafemi strives towards portraying the fight against marriage extortion and social stratification in the society. The play starts with the discussion of two lovers; Aina and Otunla, Otunla is a poor teacher. The discussion is based on the required items for the bride price in preparation for their wedding ceremony. Aina maintains the preservation of the norms and tradition of the payment of the outrageous bride price. However, Otunla, perhaps, given his poor background, reveals his reservation for it. He starts protesting against it by saying;

Oh yes. And what will happen after the marriage ceremony? We open our mouth to the wind after wedlock? (11)

The bride price is unbearably prohibitive for Otunla, a mere classroom teacher. He tries to dodge it, but Aina keeps reminding him of the other fees. Obafemi also tries to establish the presence of class segregation and consciousness through AINA by telling OTUNLA about the elaborate wedding of his friend and classmate when she says:

I was present at his wedding. Everything immaculate white; flower flakes, white; champagne, white; Baby Benz wedding car, white; spot Mustang car which his father gave them as a wedding present, spotless-white. I hear the mansion his father gave them for their honeymoon...I hear it all painted White. (14)

This shows a clear gap between the rich and the poor. Otunla, as a teacher, cannot afford an elaborate wedding like that of his friend, Dokun, which is what the society expects of him, without caring about the fact that he is an ordinary man and what becomes of him and his family after the marriage. This is a realization of Otunla as a common man and Dokun belongs to the upper class, which shows they do not have equal access to wealth in the society. After this, Aina still insists on the need for the exorbitant payment at all cost. Otunla continues by exhibiting his quality as a revolutionary character by changing the wrong mindset of AINA regarding societal dictates on marriage. He says:

This your love of values and tradition must wear a hat of reason. It must be love in the reality of our present austere time, which I did not bring about. (14)

After so many persuasions and sense of awakening, Aina later comes to the consciousness that their love matters the most. Furthermore, elaborate traditional wedding is unaffordable to them, as it serves as one way of oppressing the poor. This is seen in her comment that:

Stop it Otunla. I've told you it's over. I want you as you are. Nothing else matters. Not even my parents' demand for a traditional wedding. (17)

The playwright further dramatizes the corrupt nature of the society in the second atmosphere of. In this part of the play, Chief Awadanu, a corrupt politician, enters to tell his wife, Abeke, about the cheque he gets barely a

day after he won a contract without passing through due process. Abeke is surprised to hear that and expresses her disbelief saying:

Chief, I still don't believe it. You won the contract only yesterday, and the cash is flowing already. No quotation. No seeing all the officials and ministry people. No lobbying, eh? (19)

This exposes how corruption has eaten deep into the system. Chief collects cheque of a contract he just won, the day before and even without passing through the official process. The corruption continues as Obafemi describes the dubious means of how Chief Awadanu gets to power. This is seen in his conversation with his wife Abeke:

CHIEF: Shut up. Dat na demoncrazy. Na to win before voting, kawai. Finish. I tell you, na the will of the people. Our people. One Nation.

ABEKE: Yes through thuggery and house burning, all to achieve bandwagon effect. Victory via rigging (23).

This reveals the means by which Chief acquired his wealth and power. Through this, we can see that Chief Awadanu's party emerges through electoral malpractices. The negative effects of winning election through rigging is that, such people get to the position of power to squander the wealth of the nation and it results to poverty and underdevelopment.

Dokun, another revolutionary character as presented by Obafemi, corrects the bad deeds of his father, Chief Awadanu thus:

All right. Thank you papa. You can call Otunla and others who are bringing light to the darkness which your party covers the land with any names you want. Papa, you are making a mistake. They are the hope of our future, those men with conscience. And that is why you people are afraid. And dad, I have begun to see the light. If you are afraid of your past of poverty, what about all our people who are condemned to it? Why single me out? (29)

This is a core feature of revolutionists as they are set to influence, teach and enlighten people on their bad deeds and a need for a good one with the hope for a better society. Dokun then finally declares his revolutionary vision to his father. He says:

No father. To reject the injustice and corruption that prevails in our land as we fight to build anew what you have destroyed. (30)

Dokun has seen the need to bring injustice and corruption that prevail in the society to an end even though his father is also a core practitioner of corruption. After so much discussion with his father, he is able to acknowledge the fact that revolution is about to take place when he says:

CHIEF: (Exasperated, he throws his hand helplessly at the audience) O ho, this yeyeworld dondey come to an end ooh

DOKUN: Yes papa. And we await a new one. (30)

Other revolutionary characters in the play are the market women. This is made evident in the discussion between Mama and Baba. The market women are being oppressed by depriving them of their civic rights. They are maltreated and molested by the soldiers, even though they do not commit any offence. The weight of the oppression is carried through the dialogue between Mama and Papa thus:

MAMA: They threw us out of the market, out of our stalls which we bought and paid for, from the sweat of our brows. We saw it coming, but we did not know that the grass that was growing will bring madness with it. Boys in khaki uniform say that our stalls take away from the beauty of the city.

BABA: Okay, so did they build new ones, beautiful ones that will make our guest lick the ground?

MAMA: Night after night, they paraded the market, and helped themselves to some of our goods at the close of every market. Then suddenly they came with their guns. ...They came in jeeps and trucks with their machine guns; battle ready, it was a raid operation. They came to uproot us from our only source of livelihood; our stalls. Like armed robbers and marauders they looted what they didn't want to destroy. All our valuable wares, gone to beautify the city. (41)

The above quotation makes us to understand the level at which they are oppressed. The governments, who are the people's representatives, use the military men to oppress the market women, who are the masses and deny them of their right to own properties. The market women after experiencing and enduring this night after night decide to go on a peaceful protest against the oppressive policy of the government by exposing their breast during the cause of the protest, which Papa sees as an action against the norms of the Yoruba land.

The Fourth Atmosphere of the play shows the meeting of intellectuals such as Otunla, Aina, Dokun, and Debby as they stand to their feet as revolutionary characters to fight against the expensive traditional wedding that is not affordable to an ordinary man, thereby restricting them from getting married. Even if they eventually struggle to get married, they run into debt which impoverishes them. They acknowledge that marriage is everyone's right, but only those who can afford the cost can participate in it. This shows that wedding ceremony is a means of dividing the society to classes. They overcome this by organizing a four-man wedding ceremony, which shows they are now independent and have gained freedom from the ideology that wedding is only for the noble man and not for a common man. This is shown by the revolutionary speech rendered by the friends:

OTUNLA: We must burn the poisoned weed in our season of renewal. To build for the future, we disown the godfathers across the sea. Then this nuptial tune will bring harmony

AINA: Come now join in the dance, the dance of the future, of tomorrow. Otunla, that's your name. Let us search for it so that we can hear the hopeful cry of rebirth

OTUNLA: From the cord of your unborn baby

ALL: Bring the birth of a new dream for the land. (56)

They gain freedom from exorbitant payment before wedding which leads to joy of a new dream for the land.

## VI. REVOLUTIONARY ELEMENTS AND TECHNIQUES EMPLOYED IN *NAIRA HAS NO GENDER*

In *Naira Has No Gender*, Olu Obafemi makes use of contact cultures. That is, the contact in the cultures of Europeans and Africans. The European culture is what many Africans believe to be the modern way of life. This mixture of culture is what is referred to as trado-modern way of life in a post-modern society where Aina, Otunla and other characters in the play find themselves.

Olu Obafemi makes use of the post-modern society to bring the traditional belief of people and modern way of life together by portraying a wedding ceremony in both modern and traditional ways. He uses this to make a point about social inequality where people can afford such marriage and some people cannot, due to class differences existing in the society. The people of high class such as Chief Awadanu who amass wealth in a very dubious and corrupt way is able to afford such an expensive wedding for his son, Dokun, who happens to be a friend to Otunla. The poor radical teacher who is from the lower class cannot afford to have his own wedding the way others have theirs because he is financially weak.

The trado-modern marriage is what Olu Obafemi uses to expose the agony of a common man, how people are being oppressed and subjected to abject poverty through constant embezzlement of the so-called political leaders who only work for their pockets and stomachs and not the masses who voted for them. Whatever they do after they assume political offices is always in contradiction to whatever they have promised during campaign.

The African belief about marriage is another technique the playwright employs as Aina tells Otunla that “the price for a wholesome woman is never counted”. Yes. It is true to the Yoruba belief, but Obafemi really makes a point through Otunla as he replies Aina saying “what will happen after the marriage ceremony? We open our mouths to the wind after the wedlock?” He also makes use of songs as a means of beautifying the play and to pass across some significant information. Aina’s song in Appendix one of the play is a good example of revolution against an expensive conventional belief:

Mama mi  
Mama mi o, Mama mi aa  
Moti re ni to wumi, ma fe o  
Se ko tile lowolowo  
O so mo to dara  
Opolo re jina  
Mama mi ma fe, mama mi o (Appendix one, 57)

There are many songs in this play from Appendix one to Appendix nine in which Olu Obafemi uses songs to beautify the play and express African traditional culture; how Africans respect and have regard for their culture. Despite Otunla’s radicalism towards exorbitant payment for wedding ceremony, he still pays the bride price of Aina which is in accordance with the dictate of Yoruba custom and tradition. This is made known when Aina reminds her parent that “my bride price has been paid, remember? The required rites have been fulfilled” (45).

Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* says that “proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten” (5). Olu Obafemi does not only make use of proverbs, he also enriches the linguistic dexterity of the play with idiomatic expressions which add beauty to the play. Aina asks Otunla that “have you ever seen banana tree dying without its siblings sprouting? Where have you heard of red coal perishing without ashes?” (13). Aina is saying this to establish the fact to Otunla that she can never be barren, that she will give birth to her own children before she

leaves the world to the great beyond. Baba also makes an important point with the use of idiom when he and Mama are having a discussion saying “don’t throw my mind further into the deep and muddy water of riddles” meaning that mama should not keep him in suspense that she should just tell him whatever she has to say in time. Obafemi also makes use of metaphorical words as mama regards baba as “my lion” showing the prowess of a man over a woman, meaning that the husband is the leader and the head of the family at every point in time.

Olu Obafemi as a playwright has proved his artistic mastery by portraying a revolutionary play as a play that is set in a postmodern society where there is a mixture of traditional ethos and European ways of life. He has really uses trado-modern wedding ceremony to expose the suffering and the plight of the oppressed and also encourages the oppressed on how to take their destinies into their hands and fight for their rights because a closed mouth is a closed destiny. He makes use of both traditional and modern techniques to beautify the play.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Olu Obafemi, through his play *Naira Has No Gender* focuses on purging the society of its ills and shortcomings. He uses different styles and techniques to bring out aesthetics of revolution in his play. His aim in this play is to use drama as a tool to conscientise the people to combat the decadence of a dystopian society in order to emancipate the oppressed masses, and to reconstruct the society on a new socialist orientation.

Dramatists should commit themselves to the course of the less privileged, oppressed and depressed in the society. In an ill-structured society like Nigeria and Africa as a whole, committed writers should see revolution as an instrument of change and not violence. Ogunbesan says “Achebe now said that the role of the **African writer should** be that of a social transformer and revolutionary” (43). Dramatists and the citizens should not see revolution as a means to kill, shed blood, destroy houses and properties but to emancipate and construct the society, for the betterment of all.

This paper therefore seeks for equity and egalitarian society. It advocates for a balanced society and not the type of society that the minority few (Bourgeois) will be the one enjoying the labour of the masses (Proletariat). Revolution should not be about one tribe against another or a military coup to remove a dictator and replace it with another, but revolution should involve all people of different tribes, religions and colour of skins coming together to wrestle against injustice, oppression, poverty, bad leadership, embezzlement, killing, slavery and other forms of social injustice.

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