

## Book Review

*The Revolutionary Drama and Theatre of Femi Osofisan*, Chima Osakwe, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018, Hardcover, 94pp, ISBN (10) 1-5275-1596-6; ISBN (13) 978-1.5275-1596-3 (cloth).

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Committed art has been the core of postcolonial African writing. The drama and theatre of the Nigerian-born playwright and critic, Femi Osofisan, corroborate the works of other African playwrights such as Bole Butake, Bate Besong, Samuel Kasule, Alemseged Tesfai etc. who critique the lofty vision of nationalism through experimental techniques of theatre. Hence African theatre and drama from across the continent engage satiric tropes to echo the plights of people driven to the borders of society because of abortive nationalist projects.

Chima Osakwe's critical assessment of the drama and theatre of Osofisan in *The Revolutionary Drama and Theatre of Femi Osofisan* emphasizes on the relevance of arts in the social, political, and cultural transformation of nations that are emerging from colonial violence. In situating Femi Osofisan within the category of second generation of Nigerian playwrights, Osakwe averteedly expresses the view that critics' encounter with the thematic of Osofisan's works share the playwright's experience of the transformation of his society at critical stages of historical and political development; subjects that Osakwe states are conveyed through specific language paradigm, the trope of the market-place and role-playing techniques that are often rooted in the metatheatrical quality of the playwright's works. It is along this line that Osakwe perceives Osofisan's drama as revolutionary, highlighting how such an approach is delivered in a mood that consciously manipulates the "content and technique to empower the underprivileged, whether as an individual or a group, to gain socio-political and economic rights and privileges or overthrow an

oppressive political system or repressive institutions of civil society..." (p.1). Osofisan's use of total theatre which Osakwe states is characteristic of most of his dramatic pieces, is debated in the book for its advancement of the revolutionary agenda. Propagating notions of human rights and equality which he argues are deeply-rooted in the selected works of Osofisan, Osakwe employs Marxist critical construct and Frantz Fanon's ideological understanding and approach to decolonisation (pp.3-4) as a strategy to not only highlight Osofisan's disillusionment with the nationalist project, but also to interrogate the role of the postcolonial elite in nation building. The author argues in the "Introduction" and Chapter One" of the book that nationalism which contributed, legitimately, to the independence of nations previously under colonial rule, only replicates the same oppressive colonial infrastructure against which it was formulated. Therefore in the second chapter of the book, the author again associates Marxist and Fanon ideological framework, in order to pursue the intricacies of class struggle in *Morountodun* and *The Chattering and the Song*; both plays which according to Osakwe, project characters who vie to not only dismantle a dictatorial political regime, but also to claim a voice through which political demagogy is wrecked in favour for a peaceful co-existence among the citizenry. Pursuing "Class Antagonism, Oppression and Revolution..." in the third chapter, Osakwe explores the impact of military dictatorships in the society. In such circumstances, the chapter speaks about the characters' application of intellectual strategies – verbal argumentative confrontation" and "a subtle elimination of the symbols of oppression" (p. 45) – instead of overt violence in *No More the Wasted Breed* and *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* respectively, to canvass for change in a tumultuous social and political setup. Osakwe defends the versatility of Osofisan's art, a strategy engaged not only to contribute to the aesthetics of the genre, but also to interrogate hegemonic power elusiveness that continue to permeate administrative infrastructures in postcolonial societies.

*The Revolutionary Drama and Theatre of Femi Osofisan* by Chima Osakwe is a valuable contribution to the already existing research on the works of Osofisan. Its concise structure and accessible language make it a resourceful material for postcolonial research, teachers and students of African literature as a whole.