

CONFLICT MANIFESTATIONS AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST AFRICA: CASE STUDY OF FEMI OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN* AND *WOMEN OF OWU*

Kangni ADAMA

Université de Lomé, Togo
ORCID iD: 0009-0000-1446-009X
adamkanfr@gmail.com

Ibrahima COULIBALY

Ecole Normale Supérieure, Côte d'Ivoire
ORCID iD: 0009-0004-9624-6749
ibra.coulibaly092@gmail.com

&

Kokouvi Mawulé d'ALMEIDA

Université de Lomé, Togo
ORCID iD: 0009-0002-0537-9294
kdalmeida23@gmail.com

Abstract: This study examines how conflicts hinder national development in West Africa and explores the diplomatic solutions proposed by Femi Osofisan through a postcolonial perspective. Peaceful coexistence within communities is essential for sustainable development, yet socio-political conflicts continue to weaken social stability and economic progress in many West African societies. In *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, Osofisan portrays fictional societies marked by exploitation, poor living conditions, injustice, and irresponsibility. These factors become major sources of conflict and obstacles to national development. Through the analysis of these plays, this study, grounded in Marxist theory, demonstrates how the playwright condemns violence, class oppression, exploitation, and social injustice while promoting dialogue, justice, peace, and reconciliation as necessary conditions for sustainable development in West Africa.

Keywords: Conflict, Manifestations, Sustainable Development, Class Struggle, Marxism.

LES MANIFESTATIONS DU CONFLIT ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT NATIONAL EN AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST : ETUDE DE CAS DE *MOROUNTODUN* AND *WOMEN OF OWU* DE FEMI OSOFISAN

Résumé : Cette étude examine la manière dont les conflits entravent le développement national en Afrique de l'Ouest et analyse les solutions diplomatiques proposées par Femi Osofisan à travers une approche postcoloniale. La coexistence pacifique entre les populations constitue une condition essentielle au développement durable. Cependant, les conflits sociopolitiques continuent d'affaiblir la stabilité sociale et le progrès économique dans plusieurs sociétés ouest-africaines. Dans *Morountodun* et *Women of Owu*, Osofisan met en scène des sociétés fictives marquées par l'exploitation, les mauvaises conditions de vie, l'injustice et l'irresponsabilité. Ces réalités deviennent des sources majeures de conflits et des obstacles au développement national. À travers l'analyse de ces pièces, cette étude, fondée sur la théorie marxiste, montre comment le dramaturge condamne la violence, l'oppression de classe, l'exploitation et l'injustice sociale tout en promouvant le dialogue, la justice, la paix et la réconciliation comme des conditions nécessaires au développement durable en Afrique de l'Ouest.

Mots-clés : Conflit, Manifestations, Développement durable, Lutte de classe, Marxisme

Introduction

Conflict has become a recurring problem in West Africa and remains one of the major obstacles to national development. As Brown (1996) argues, “violent conflict destroys the foundations of development by weakening institutions, displacing populations, and reducing economic productivity.” Political instability, ethnic tensions, civil wars, and social injustice continue to affect many African societies. These conflicts slow down economic growth, weaken social cohesion, destroy infrastructure, and negatively affect education and human welfare. According to Stewart (2004, p. 261), “war and civil violence reduce investment, damage infrastructure, and create long-term barriers to human development.” In such a context, literature plays an important role in examining the causes and consequences of conflicts in West African societies.

Femi Osofisan is an African playwright whose works address issues such as war, oppression, injustice, and resistance. Through his plays, he exposes the realities of African societies and denounces the suffering caused by violence and political domination. In *Morountodun*, published in 1982, Osofisan dramatizes the Agbekoya farmers' revolt and presents the conflict between the ruling class and the oppressed masses. The play highlights exploitation, inequality, and social resistance. In *Women of Owu*, published in 2006, the playwright focuses on the tragic consequences of war through the suffering of women and children after the destruction of Owu. This goes in the same line of idea with, Deng (1996) who notes that “armed conflicts often affect women and children disproportionately, leaving deep social and psychological scars on communities.”

Previous studies have examined Femi Osofisan's plays from different perspectives. Among them, Chukwu-Okoronkwo (2015) focuses on Osofisan's “Revolutionary Philosophy and Revolutionary Aestheticism in *Morountodun* and *The Chattering and the Song*”, showing how the playwright promotes resistance against oppression. Nelson Obasi and Aloysius Orjinta (2013) argue that Osofisan's Marxism is limited because his plays sometimes favor compromise rather than total revolution. Augustine Obiajulu EZIECHINE (2025), on the other hand, studies the representation of women in *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, presenting women as agents of social change and resistance.

Although previous studies have investigated Osofisan's plays from Marxist feminist, and revolutionary perspectives, little attention has been paid to the relationship between conflict and national development in the two plays. They do not examine how war, oppression, political violence, and social injustice hinder sustainable development in West Africa. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2005) emphasizes that “without peace and social stability, sustainable development remains impossible.” Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how Osofisan portrays conflict as a major obstacle to national development while promoting peace, justice, dialogue, and reconciliation as essential conditions for sustainable development in West Africa. In fact, the two plays portray the different forms of conflict that shape West African societies and examine their destructive effects on social stability and national development. Through the experiences of the fictional characters, Osofisan reveals how violence, oppression, war, and injustice contribute to poverty, displacement, trauma, and the destruction of human and material resources in society.

The study seeks to answer the following questions: How do Femi Osofisan's plays portray the manifestations of conflicts in West African societies, and how do these conflicts constitute obstacles to national development? This study argues that Osofisan's plays show conflict as more than politics and economics. They also show class oppression, gender

violence, and social breakdown. These are lasting obstacles to national development. In *Morountodun*, the ruling elite keeps peasants poor and powerless. This weakens trust in government and slows progress. In *Women of Owu*, war's cost falls hardest on women. They face displacement, loss, slavery, and sexual violence. This destroys the human resources a nation needs to rebuild. The two plays show different conflicts, one about class, one about war between peoples. But Osofisan offers the same solution in both. He presents dialogue and reconciliation as the path to peace and development.

It contends that these interconnected forms of conflict constitute significant obstacles to sustainable national development. This research is grounded in Marxist criticism, which examines class struggle, exploitation, and the oppression of the masses by the ruling class. According to Paolo Abis (1987, p. 45), "Viewed from the Marxist perspective, the literary works of a period would, then, reveal the state of the struggle between classes in a historical place and moment." Marxist criticism therefore provides an appropriate framework for analyzing how Osofisan exposes social inequality, political domination, and the suffering of the oppressed masses in the plays. This study is organized into three main parts. The first part depicts class struggle and political oppression in *Morountodun*, focusing on class division, state power, repression, and revolutionary consciousness. The second part explores war, gender, and the human cost of conflict in *Women of Owu*, highlighting violence, social collapse, and the suffering and marginalization of women. The third part offers a comparative reading of both plays and examines the diplomatic solutions that Osofisan proposes as pathways to peace, justice, and social transformation in relation to national development.

1. Class Struggle and Political Oppression as Impediments to National Development in *Morountodun*

Class struggle and political oppression are two of the most persistent forces shaping conflict in unequal societies. Where economic resources and political power are concentrated in the hands of a few, class struggle tends to surface as dominant groups exploit those beneath them, while political oppression works through state institutions and coercive tools to protect elite interests and crush dissent. The result is a cycle of instability, widening inequality, and stalled national development. Marx and Engels put it bluntly in *The Communist Manifesto*: "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (Marx & Engels, 2002:14). Their argument is that conflict between classes is not accidental, it is built into who owns the means of production, and it is kept in place by political and ideological control. Seen this way, political institutions do not just fail to promote justice; they are often designed to protect the status quo instead.

In *Morountodun*, Femi Osofisan explores conflict between the ruling class and the oppressed masses. This happens in a society marked by inequality and injustice. The play tells the story of the Agbekoya farmers' revolt. It shows how abuse of power, economic exploitation, and political repression create tension. These forces also create resistance. The central conflict comes from one thing: the clash between the privileged ruling class and the oppressed peasantry.

In his plays, Osofisan presents a society divided by economic inequality, where the wealthy elite enjoy social privileges while rural farmers suffer exploitation and deprivation. In fact, the Director introduces in the plays, the historical context of the Agbekoya uprising by explaining that "ordinary farmers... rose up and confronted the state" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 200). This statement establishes class conflict as the foundation of the play. From a Marxist perspective, class struggle is the inevitable consequence of unequal ownership of economic

resources. The peasant revolt in *Morountodun* therefore reflects the historical confrontation between the oppressed class and those who control wealth and power. The hostility between the two classes is further emphasized by the slogans shouted by Titubi's supporters: "Down with agitators!...crush the peasant revolt!... Who does not want money?" (Osofisan, 1982:201). These slogans reflect the bourgeois ideology that equates wealth with legitimacy while portraying the peasants' struggle as a threat to social order.

In addition, political oppression in the play is linked to the protection of elite interests. Osofisan demonstrates that state institutions function primarily to defend the dominant class rather than to ensure social justice. This is clear in how the police act. They automatically side with Titubi and the wealthy class. At the same time, they treat dissent as a crime. When the Director attempts to explain the situation, "the Corporal dismisses him and orders his arrest" (Osofisan, 1982, pp. 203-204). The state's selective use of authority illustrates what Marxist theorists describe as the class character of political institutions. Paraphrasing Marx and Engels (2002), the state functions as a tool used by the ruling class to maintain its power and control over the oppressed class. Therefore, the intervention of the police in the play illustrates the state's role in protecting the interests of the dominant class rather than addressing the underlying causes of social conflict. This abuse of state authority is further illustrated when the Superintendent immediately orders; "Take him away and lock him up" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 203), despite the absence of any investigation. Osofisan therefore portrays the police as instruments of class repression rather than impartial defenders of justice.

Furthermore, Osofisan exposes the arrogance and ideological dominance of the bourgeois class through the character of Titubi and her mother, Alhaja Kabirat. As wealthy market leaders, they see social privilege as a natural right. They reject any criticism of economic inequality. Titubi openly boasts about the power of money. She declares, "I have money and I can enslave you with it!" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 202). This statement shows how far wealth has become a tool of domination. Marxist criticism sees such attitudes as bourgeois ideology. This ideology normalizes exploitation. It also hides structural inequalities.

Titubi reinforces this domination by throwing money at the Director and ordering him to dance, declaring: "Money!... Dance for me!" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 202). This scene demonstrates how economic power becomes an instrument of symbolic domination over those who challenge the ruling class. According to Louis Althusser (1971, p. 127), "dominant ideologies function to secure the consent of the oppressed and reproduce existing power structures". Titubi's confidence in the power of wealth therefore exemplifies the ideological superiority claimed by the ruling class.

The play also reveals that peasant resistance emerges as a response to material deprivation and economic exploitation. The peasants are not portrayed as naturally violent; rather, they are driven to rebellion by unbearable living conditions. Superintendent Salami acknowledges this reality when he explains that, "the peasants are united by the greatest force in the world-hunger and that they have risen to say no, no more!" (Osofisan, 1982:212). This observation highlights the economic roots of the conflict. Marxist theory maintains that revolutionary movements arise when exploited groups become conscious of their shared conditions and challenge systems of oppression. Salami further reveals the depth of the peasants' suffering by noting that "their children die of kwashiorkor" (Osofisan, 1982:212).

Beyond its literal meaning, kwashiorkor functions here as a metaphor for the deeper structural ills that stunt the growth of a society, just as malnutrition stunts the growth of a child. The disease comes from chronic deprivation of essential nutrients. It mirrors a nation

deprived of resources, justice, and equity. These are the things a nation needs for real development. The image of malnourished children becomes a symbol. It represents stagnated national development. Political oppression and economic exploitation deny the population what it needs to progress. By extension, they deny the nation too. This reading suggests something important. The revolt is not driven by criminal intent. It is driven by extreme material deprivation and social injustice. As Georg Lukács (1971:51) argues, 'class-consciousness develops when oppressed people recognize the structural causes of their suffering'. Like a starved child, a nation cannot grow under deprivation. The peasants' resistance in *Morountodun* is thus both a literal and symbolic struggle for justice

Moreover, Osofisan suggests that political oppression and class inequality constitute major obstacles to national development. Instead of promoting social welfare, the ruling elite devote their energy to defending privileges and suppressing popular demands. The Superintendent himself admits that "the peasants accuse wealthy politicians of taking off the profits of their farms for personal enrichment" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 212). Such exploitation deepens social tensions and fuels conflict, thereby undermining national stability. From a Marxist standpoint, genuine development cannot occur in a society characterized by class domination and economic injustice. As David Harvey (2005, p. 64) explains, "Social progress requires the equitable distribution of resources and the dismantling of structures that reproduce inequality. Through the reading of *Morountodun*, Osofisan demonstrates that sustainable national development depends on addressing the root causes of class oppression and social exclusion.

Another important dimension of class struggle and political oppression in *Morountodun* is the deliberate manipulation of power by the state to control dissent and suppress the oppressed peasants. Osofisan presents the state not as a neutral arbiter, but as an active participant in class domination, using military and police force to protect elite interests. This is evident when the Deputy Superintendent explains that "the peasants are organized and united by the greatest force in the world-hunger and warns that they are advancing toward confrontation" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 212). This statement reveals both the recognition of structural inequality and the state's readiness to respond through coercive power rather than social reform. From a Marxist perspective, the state functions as an ideological and repressive apparatus that maintains the dominance of the ruling class. As Louis Althusser (1971, p. 142) explains, "The state operates through both Repressive State Apparatuses such as the police and military and Ideological State Apparatuses to reproduce existing relations of production". In this sense, the police presence and military readiness in the play illustrate how state violence is normalized as a tool for maintaining capitalist and class hierarchies.

Ultimately, Osofisan shows Titubi joining in her own the peasant struggle as a way to explore class awareness and to reveal how limited the bourgeoisie's understanding of oppression can be. Her decision to join the peasants is symbolic and it represents a shift from bourgeois privilege toward experiential understanding of oppression, suggesting that awareness of inequality can emerge through direct engagement with marginalized groups. This is demonstrated "when Titubi insists on entering the movement and declares her determination to confront the peasant leader, Marshal, within two weeks" (Osofisan, 1982, p. 206). Her action reflects a willingness to abandon inherited class comfort in order to understand the lived reality of the oppressed. According to Georg Lukács (1971, p. 51), "class consciousness develops when individuals move beyond false consciousness and begin to perceive the totality of social relations shaping their existence." Similarly, Paulo Freire

(1970, p. 66) emphasizes, "Liberation requires conscientization, a process through which individuals critically recognize oppression through lived experience". Titubi's journey therefore symbolizes the potential for ideological transformation and the bridging of class divisions necessary for social change and national development.

Morountodun shows class struggle and political oppression as connected. Together, they shape an unequal society. The Agbekoya revolt reveals three things. Economic exploitation, state repression, and elite ideology keep the ruling class in power. At the same time, they push the peasants to resist. The play sends a clear message. Real change needs class-consciousness. It also needs an end to unjust structures. These structures block justice and national development. While *Morountodun* focuses on class struggle and political oppression within society, *Women of Owu* shifts the focus to war and its devastating human consequences, especially the collapse of social order and the suffering of women that hinder national development.

2. War, Gender and Human Cost of Conflict as Underminers of National Development in *Women of Owu*

War, gender, and the human cost of conflict are intertwined, and together they expose just how devastating armed violence can be for individuals and entire societies. War does not just destroy lives, property, and institutions. Its impact falls unevenly. Social status and gender decide who suffers most. Women, children, and other vulnerable groups suffer the most. They face exploitation, trauma, and the loss of safety and stability. War's human cost goes beyond the battlefield. It damages cultural identity. It weakens social bonds and it slows national development. Johan Galtung (1969, p. 168), offers a useful lens here, "Violence", he writes, "exists whenever human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations". This definition pushes the conversation beyond physical destruction alone, pointing instead to structural inequality and the slow, lasting suffering conflict leaves behind. Read through a Marxist lens, war can also be understood as an extension of struggles over power and domination, one that reinforces existing social hierarchies and deepens the oppression of already marginalized groups. This chapter examines how war, gender inequality, and the human cost of conflict are portrayed in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*.

One of the central ways conflicts are represented in *Women of Owu* is through the devastating violence that destroys communities and leaves behind suffering of people especially women. Femi Osofisan presents war not as a heroic event, but as a destructive force that annihilates both human lives and social structures and that also hinder the development of any society. After seven years of siege, the city of Owu is finally attacked and reduced to ruins, while its inhabitants are massacred. As Osofisan explains, "the allied forces were determined that the city must never rise again, leading to the total destruction of Owu and the slaughter of nearly all its citizens" (Osofisan, 2006, p. 5). Through this representation, the playwright emphasizes that the consequences of violent conflicts extend far beyond the battlefield; war's aim here is not merely military defeat but the erasure of an entire community, its people, and its future.

From a Marxist point of view, this destruction can be interpreted as a manifestation of power struggles where domination is exercised through violence. Gugelberger (1985, p. 8), argues that "literature should situate social realities within their historical, political, and economic contexts rather than treating conflict as isolated events". In this sense, the destruction of Owu reflects how war becomes an instrument through which dominant groups

impose control, reinforcing systems of oppression and inequality within society. The total destruction of Owu is further emphasized by the women's recollection that, after seven years of siege, "the Allied Forces destroy the city. They massacre all the citizens, except the women, whom they save to distribute among themselves as booties of war" (Osofisan, 2006, p. vi). This passage underlines the brutality of war by showing that victory is achieved through the annihilation of an entire community rather than military conquest alone.

Another important manifestation of conflict in *Women of Owu* is gendered suffering, particularly the disproportionate burden placed on women during wartime. Osofisan shifts attention away from male warriors and instead focuses on women as the primary victims of war. Following the fall of Owu, women are forced to confront the deaths of their husbands and sons while also facing an uncertain future as captives. The play makes this explicit when "the women lament that some of them will become concubines to the officers, others domestic servants, while others will be sold into slavery" (Osofisan, 2006, p. 6). This moment highlights how women's bodies become sites of exploitation during conflict. Casting a glance at Marxist criticism helps deepen this understanding by showing how oppression often targets vulnerable groups within unequal power structures. According to Omafume Onoge (Onoge, as cited in Gugelberger, 1985, p. 47), "radical literary criticism must examine society through "the eyes of oppressed groups and reveal the institutional processes that sustain domination". In *Women of Owu*, women occupy this oppressed position, illustrating how conflicts reproduce systems of exploitation where certain groups suffer more intensely because of their social vulnerability.

Moreover, the play also demonstrates how war produces psychological trauma that continues long after physical violence has ended. Throughout the drama, the women express grief, fear, and emotional exhaustion after witnessing the destruction of their homeland. Erelu, the former queen, becomes the central voice of collective suffering as she and the other women mourn the loss of their families and future. The narrator perspective explains that "Olasope notes these women are accustomed to grief and pain after enduring seven years of siege and eventually witnessing the annihilation of their homeland" (Olasope, 2013:110). Osofisan therefore portrays conflict not only as physical destruction but also as a traumatic human experience. This idea aligns with Marxist thought, which views human suffering as connected to broader systems of social oppression. Gugelberger (1985:9) explains that "Marxist criticism seeks to expose the material conditions that produce suffering and insists that literature should reveal realities that dominant structures often attempt to hide". In *Women of Owu*, trauma is not accidental but emerges from violent structures of domination created through war and political rivalry.

Furthermore, conflict in the play also leads to cultural disintegration, showing how war destroys not only lives but also collective identity and traditional values. The fall of Owu represents the disappearance of an entire social world built around family bonds, communal solidarity, and cultural continuity. Once conquered, survivors are dispersed, families are separated, and the cultural foundation of the community begins to disappear. Olasope observes that the women's lament becomes "the final expression voiced by the female community of Owu before it is dispersed, and the complete obliteration of the city" (Olasope, 2013:106). The destruction of Owu therefore symbolizes the fragmentation of cultural identity caused by violent conflict. According to Gugelberger (1985:40), "Literature must expose the relationship between oppression and the social structures that sustain inequality, arguing that class-based struggles often reshape cultural realities and collective identity". In other words, from a Marxist theoretical standpoint, this reflects the idea that systems of

domination often weaken collective consciousness in order to maintain control. In *Women of Owu*, the destruction of cultural cohesion demonstrates how conflict gives way to underdevelopment by dismantling the very social structures communities rely on for survival and continuity.

In a whole, *Women of Owu* shows that the consequences of war extend far beyond victory or defeat. Osofisan presents conflict as a cycle of violence that produces poverty, trauma, exploitation, and the destruction of social and cultural life. Through a Marxist lens, the play reveals how conflict functions within systems of domination that perpetuate inequality and human suffering. In this way, *Women of Owu* serves as a critique of war and reminds readers that the true cost of conflict is ultimately borne by people, especially those who occupy society's most vulnerable positions. The play ultimately advocates peace over violence, reminding audiences that war leaves permanent scars on both victors and victims. As Olosope observes, Osofisan concludes with "a strong reprimand against war and all its distresses" urging societies not to allow political ambitions to destroy human lives and communal harmony (Olosope, 2013, p. 117).

Beyond the immediate suffering caused by war, *Women of Owu* also suggests that the consequences of conflict do not end with physical destruction or individual trauma. The collapse of communities, the loss of human capital, and the breakdown of social structures affect the development of any society. By portraying how conflict leaves long-lasting scars on both individuals and communities, Osofisan invites readers to reflect on a larger reality that is conflict remains one of the major obstacles to national progress, as it weakens the foundations necessary for sustainable development.

3. Diplomatic Resolution of Conflict as Determinants of National Development: A Comparative Reading of Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*

Conflict, diplomacy, and national development are closely linked. Social, political, and armed conflicts wear down the economic, political, and human foundations that sustainable development relies on. They fracture social cohesion, weaken institutions, and close off opportunities for growth. The UNDP (2021) makes a similar point across its recent work, arguing that violent conflict ranks among the greatest obstacles to sustainable development, since it destroys human capital, weakens institutions, drives up poverty, and widens social inequality. Marxist theory arrives at a related conclusion from a different angle. It treats conflict as a product of unequal social relations and insists that real national development is out of reach as long as systems of exploitation and domination continue to shape how society runs. Diplomacy offers a counterpoint to this destructive force. Nicolson (1939) defines diplomacy as "the management of international relations through negotiation, describing it as the method by which relations between parties are adjusted and managed" (p 4-5). In this study, that definition is extended to cover not only relations between states, but also relations between conflicting groups within a society. Understood this way, diplomatic solutions to conflict are the traditional principles and strategies adopted within African communities for conflict resolution. These include dialogue, mediation, negotiation, and rejection of revenge, as well as responsibility, empathy, compromise, and women's participation in negotiation. Osofisan demonstrates these strategies in *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, showing how fractured societies can use them to repair the damage conflict inflicts and move back toward stability and growth.

Dialogue and persuasion constitute one of the most important diplomatic principles in Osofisan's work. The playwright suggests that when injustice creates antagonism, the first

response should be communication rather than violence. In *Morountodun*, this is shown through the story of Moremi. When military confrontation looms, Anlugbua notes that “Ife could have tried other means of persuasion” (Osofisan, 2006, p. 19), placing dialogue in direct opposition to force. The same philosophy appears later when Baba asks Marshal, “How shall we know their intentions if we don’t give the truce a chance?” (Osofisan, 2006, pp. 245–246), favouring verification over immediate violence. This preference carries weight because the peasants’ revolt stems from unresolved material inequality. Their earlier attempts to communicate through “letters, petitions, repeated grievances” (Osofisan, 2006, p. 237–238) went unanswered, and it was this failure, not innate violence, that drove them to confrontation. *Women of Owu* shows a different use of dialogue. Since the city has already been destroyed, speech can no longer prevent war but instead becomes a form of resistance to what war has left behind. Erelu repeatedly tries to reach Iyunloye. More broadly, the women turn to lament and collective expression to voice their suffering, using speech, as Olosope notes, to “lament the loss of their kinfolk or the misfortune that awaits them” (Osofisan, 2013, p.111). Dialogue here gives marginalised characters a voice and questions the legitimacy of violence even after it has occurred.

Moreover, Osofisan’s second diplomatic principle is the rejection of revenge. He presents revenge as dangerous because it perpetuates violence rather than resolving it. In *Women of Owu*, this appears through the contrast between the mourning women and Orisaye, who instead vows, “I shall take my revenge!” and promises to destroy Kusa’s people “without remorse” (Osofisan, 2006, III, 679- 692), a reaction that, however understandable after collective trauma, cannot rebuild Owu or restore the dead. *Morountodun* reinforces this rejection when Baba opposes Mosun’s demand to execute the captured Buraimoh and Lawyer Isaac, insisting that “executions are a different thing, especially when the victims are our own kinsmen” (Osofisan, 2006, p. 231). Instead of killing them, he suggests taking their harvest and keeping them as hostages, a form of justice that punishes without seeking revenge, so the community does not lose its sense of humanity. This restraint is significant because Marshal has real reasons to be angry and take revenge. Buraimoh built his wealth off the labour of Marshal’s father and other workers (Osofisan, 2006, p. 229). Yet instead of letting Marshal seek personal revenge, Osofisan channels this anger into collective justice.

Furthermore, Women’s participation in conflict settlement forms another key dimension of this diplomatic philosophy. In *Morountodun*, women take part in decisions on the war’s continuation, prisoner treatment, and peace, resisting exclusion with the words, “We want to hear this too, Marshal” (Osofisan, 2006, p. 246). In *Women of Owu*, this role is even more central. The women are, as Olosope observes, “far from being limited to the role of helpless possessions and remain at the centre of the conflict” (Osofisan, 2013, p. 110). Erelu, in particular, emerges as a moral and cultural authority who leads ancestral rituals after the men’s elimination. Women’s participation in conflict settlement thus becomes both a diplomatic strategy and a challenge to patriarchal domination, illustrating their importance to conflict resolution and, by extension, national development.

Then, compromise operates similarly as a diplomatic solution. Baba’s insistence on testing the truce (Osofisan, 2006:246) frames compromise not as capitulation but as a way of verifying intentions before further conflict. Marshal rejects this path and perishes. Yet the Director’s later admission that “peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out” (Osofisan, 2006:247) vindicates Baba’s approach. This suggests that compromise, though sometimes costly, is ultimately what secures peace. Erelu’s advice to Adumaadan after Owu’s fall reinforces this lesson. She urges her daughter-in-law to “do like

the reed in the bush... when it storms, learn also to bend” (Osofisan, 2006, V. 1015–1018) and to “surrender her pride” for her family’s survival (Osofisan, 2006, V. 1019–1021). Through this counsel, Osofisan presents compromise not as weakness but as a pragmatic strategy for survival.

In addition, negotiation is another diplomatic solution used by Osofisan. In *Morountodun*, neither the government’s repression nor the peasants’ armed resistance produces lasting peace, only negotiation does. This is confirmed by the Director who closes the play by revealing that “Marshal and his men never returned from their attack on the police station, and that peace came only afterward, through negotiation, once both sides were exhausted” (Osofisan, 2006:247-248). This recognises the peasants as a political force whose grievances raised for years through ignored petitions and cannot be resolved by force alone. *Women of Owu* shows the cost of negotiation’s absence. Competing interests over Apomu and Iyunloye lead to a seven-year siege and Owu’s total destruction, with no negotiated settlement ever emerging. Women bear the heaviest cost, facing life as concubines, servants, or slaves (Osofisan, 2006, II.321–335). Through their suffering, Osofisan demonstrates that only negotiation, not war, can secure lasting peace. Taken together, dialogue, the rejection of revenge, women’s participation, compromise and negotiation form the core of Osofisan’s diplomatic vision, showing across both plays that national development depends not on military victory but on a society’s capacity to resolve conflict through peaceful means.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that, through *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu*, Femi Osofisan portrays conflict in West Africa as both a past and present reality that hinders national development. His plays expose the damage caused by oppression, war, and injustice, while also proposing dialogue, the rejection of revenge, women’s participation, compromise, and negotiation as concrete diplomatic pathways to rebuilding society. From a Marxist perspective, the analysis shows that conflict is not accidental, but a result of problems such as class inequality, political domination, and social injustice. Through characters, historical events, and stories of resistance and suffering, Osofisan exposes the systems that produce inequality and violence. At the same time, he demonstrates that these same conflicts can be addressed through diplomatic means once their material roots are acknowledged.

The findings also show that conflict has effects that weaken national development. It destroys productive work, weakens the economy, damages governance, reduces justice, and breaks social unity. In both plays, peasants, women, and civilians suffer the most, facing poverty, displacement, trauma, and exclusion. This shows that society is shaped by inequality and domination rather than shared well-being. The comparative reading of the two plays reveals a crucial distinction. Where diplomatic mechanisms are present and pursued, as in *Morountodun*’s eventual turn to negotiation, peace becomes possible, however costly. Where they are absent, as in *Women of Owu*, conflict escalates unchecked into total destruction.

However, Osofisan does not present conflict as permanent. His plays encourage reflection and change. Through characters such as Baba, who insists on testing truces rather than pursuing revenge, and Erelu, who models both moral authority and pragmatic flexibility, the plays suggest that transformation is possible when people understand oppression and choose engagement over destruction. Women, in particular, emerge not merely as victims but as diplomatic agents who challenge patriarchal exclusion and insist on their place at the

negotiating table. In this way, literature becomes a tool for resistance and for imagining a better future.

Overall, *Morountodun* and *Women of Owu* go beyond depicting violence; they highlight the link between conflict, diplomacy, and underdevelopment in West Africa. Osofisan presents dialogue, compromise, negotiation, and the rejection of revenge as necessary conditions for sustainable development. This study therefore argues that real progress is only possible when the root causes of conflict are addressed through such diplomatic solutions, and society is built on fairness and inclusion. Ultimately, the study shows that drama and literature are powerful tools for raising awareness about conflict and fostering the collective consciousness needed for peace and sustainable development in West Africa. These plays call for a new way of thinking about political, moral, and social strategies aimed at dismantling oppressive systems and promoting justice through diplomatic engagement rather than force, ultimately reframing how conflict manifestations and national development in West Africa are understood in relation to one another.

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