

C. O. Ajidahun

Clement Olujide Ajidahun holds a PhD in English. He is a researcher in African Drama and Deputy University Librarian at Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria.
E-mail: jideajidahun@yahoo.co.uk;
jideajidahun@gmail.com

Femi Osofisan tackles graft and corruption: A reading of his socially committed plays

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Graft and corruption have become endemic and insidious in the Nigerian society that governance and leadership have continued to lack integrity and legitimacy. Femi Osofisan, a dedicated and committed apostle of change and social justice, has skillfully utilized the platform of drama to expose and ridicule the prevalence, pervasiveness and debilitating effects of graft and corruption as social vices in Nigeria. Following the tradition of African Drama's commitment to social issues, Osofisan berates all the tiers of government and the public office holders for the country's economic woes and the general poverty level of Nigerians. The concern of this paper is, therefore, an intense sociological exploration of Osofisan's plays that satirize and lampoon the seemingly legalized practice of bribery and corruption in Nigeria. A contextual and theoretical framework is provided for the paper to enable readers to have a clear conceptual understanding of the discourse. The paper also balances the pejorative and optimistic views of Osofisan on a decadent society. It concludes with his encomiums on those who have remained resolute and unwavering and his prognosis that the society will become better when such distinguished men and women are emulated and celebrated. **Keywords:** Femi Osofisan, dramaturgy, graft and corruption,

Femi Osofisan, like many African creative artists, does not restrict himself to writing politically committed plays like *A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975), *The Chattering and the Song* (1976) *The Inspector and the Hero* (1990), *Yungba—Yungba and the Dance Contest* (1993), *The Album of the Midnight Blackout* (1994), *The Engagement* (1997) and so on. As a social crusader and a member of the society, he extends his creative tentacles to explore, reflect and depict various social vices that are plaguing the Nigerian society. The depiction of such decadent aspects of the society is fundamental to him as an artist who is deeply in love with his society. Osofisan is always optimistic and hopeful that the prevalent social problems in the society can be overcome.

In this paper we shall examine the plays of Osofisan in which social problems like corruption, graft, fraud and embezzlement are depicted. But before we go into that, we shall first of all attempt a contextual analysis of corruption as a universal phenomenon. Corruption in this context will be defined from the following three perspectives: the public-office-centred, the market-centred, and the public-interest-centred, as proposed by Arnold J. Heidenheimer, Michael Johnson and Victor T. Levine.

Mushtaq H. Khan bases his definition of corruption on those parameters and gives an all-embracing definition: "corruption is an act which deviates from the formal rules of conduct governing the actions of someone in a position of public authority because of personal motives such as wealth, power or status" (12). His definition is significant in that it locates and fixes corruption within the political and economic structures on which the entire society is built.

Femi Odekunle (97) gives us a succinct typology of corruption. He divides it into five major sub-divisions. It is obviously a summary of the United Nations Organisation's typology of corruption:

- political corruption (political office-holders to retain political power);
- economic / commercial (businessmen and contractors);
- administrative / professional (casual and deliberate criminal acts by top administrative and professional personnel);
- organized corruption (large-scale and complex criminal activity by groups of elites), and
- working class corruption (artisans, messengers).

It is obvious that no itemization of the techniques of corruption can be completely exhaustive because the practitioners are always evolving new tactics and strategies for their nefarious enterprise. But the list is sufficient for our purpose here.

Corruption, at all levels of governance in Nigeria, has reached such an alarming rate that successive governments use and continue to use it as a potent weapon to amass wealth and to purchase the loyalty of political supporters, and victimize or embarrass their opponents, or those who are considered as constituting hindrances to their political ambition.

Other causes of corruption are the state of social disintegration caused by the Nigerian civil war, lack of essential social services, unemployment and under-employment, population pressure, political instability and the inequitable application of the law. But no matter the justification one gives for being corrupt, corruption will continue to remain an aberration and a social malaise, and its practitioners will continue to be seen as corrupt.

The present situation in Nigeria has got to a stage that everybody in the society, especially the artist, thinks that something urgent must be done about it before it becomes too late. J. Akin-George lamented the embarrassing state of corruption in Nigeria in 1991 and his comments are still relevant:

In recent times corruption and economic crimes have reached such an epidemic proportion that something urgent and drastic needs to be done before the entire fabric of the society collapses through their combined weight. The newspapers are filled with stories of corruption, bank frauds, drug peddling, currency faking etc. to an extent hitherto unknown in this country [...] Our reputation for corrupt and

fraudulent practices has reached such low ebb that foreigners regard every average Nigerian, especially those wishing to do businesses with them, with suspicion. We create such a very bad image for ourselves, among ourselves, among potential foreign business partners that genuine and honest people suffer. (52)

Cases of fraud are rife in the financial institutions owing to what G. Oka Orewa calls “the proliferation of merchant banks, bureau de change, and finance houses, [that] has led to serious problems of management of the Nigerian economy. (29)

Apart from individuals and corporate agencies, the successive governments in the country have also been accused of legitimizing corruption. The era of General Yakubu Gowon which was the period of oil boom made the control of power to be concentrated at the centre. Yet, the activities of all the political office holders and powerful elite and capitalists became difficult to be coordinated. The business of corruption had a very good opportunity to thrive therefore. Towards the tail end of that regime, corruption had become part of Gowon’s political agenda. That was why the new government of Murtala Muhammed that took over from Gowon had an anti-corruption crusade by first of all exposing the corrupt activities of Gowon’s administration although that new government was not allowed to stay long in power to achieve its goal before it was removed. Abdul-Razaq Olopoeia commenting on the regimes of General Ibrahim Babangida and General Sani Abacha is of the view that it was under their respective governments that the character of corruption changed rapidly and became a social norm as well as an act of state craft. (32–37)

The corruption rate has assumed a dimension that even the law enforcement agents are totally incapable of arresting the situation because they themselves are among its perpetrators. This was what made the Inspector General of Police (1991) of the Federation to conclude that “Nigeria lacks the resources and manpower needed to effectively monitor corrupt activities [...] The consequence is that people get away with corruption and precedents are set for others to copy.” (228–29)

The playwright, Femi Osofisan cannot remain silent in the midst of this corruption and decadence. *Who’s Afraid of Solarin?* (1978) is his first anti-corruption message. It is a satire on graft and corruption prevalent in the Nigerian society. The play is an adaptation of Nikolai Gogol’s *The Government Inspector* (1836). Osofisan finds a similarity between the social and political situation in Nigeria and the Imperial Russia at the time when Gogol wrote his play. At that time, the aristocrats were totally in control of government and many of the officials saw their positions as opportunities for looting the government treasury.

The play, which is structured into five parts, is built around Tai Solarin the hallowed figure of one-time Public Complaints Commissioner (PCC) for the Western Region of Nigeria comprising Oyo, Ondo and Ogun States. Tai Solarin was a historical figure and known as a firebrand, social and political analyst and commentator whom

Osofisan in a newspaper interview with Uche Uduka published in *The African Guardian* (July 30, 1987) sees “as a living icon of moral rectitude and social justice.” (28)

The Public Complaints Commission was established by the Obasanjo-Muhammed regime as a way of clearing the society of corruption. Tai Solarin, because of his dedication and diligence and commitment was appointed by government as the Public Complaints Commission. That is why the play is written in honour of him to celebrate his cause and determination to stand against public corruption.

Osofisan in a farcical manner presents a group of corrupt and fraudulent local government employees who are paralysed by fear as they await Tai Solarin, the Public Complaints Commissioner. Solarin is not physically presented on stage; only his silhouettes are. The frequent invocation of his name is symbolic. According to Kunle Ajibade “for Solarin, the man, Tai Solarin has been demystified and rendered unheroic. The Solarin of the play, then, must be seen as a conscience pricking the corrupt” (43).

In the local government presented in the play, virtually all the government officials and their operatives are corrupt and fraudulent without any exemption right from the Chairman of the Local Government Council, Chief Gbonmiayelobiojo, even to the professional beggars on the streets like Lamidi and Lemomu. That is why all of them are apprehensive of the impending official visit of Solarin. Consequently, the Chairman summons a meeting of the Council to decide how they can prevent the coming of Solarin which will spell doom for them.

Osofisan uses the meeting as an occasion to expose the corruption and fraudulent practices of the various arms of the Council as the meeting turns out to be a forum where confessional statements that border on their corrupt acts are revealed at the slightest provocation. As Ajibade describes them, “none of them is clean. They are all profiteers: woodworms that eat up council contracts.” (43) This is illustrated in the following conversation at the Council meeting (*Solarin* 6–12):

COUNCILLOR FOR COOPERATIVES: That’s not the point of our complaint, you eunuch. After all your appointment as a Director of the Breweries came to you first on radio. You didn’t reject it.

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: Don’t be silly; is it the same thing? Why are you women always confusing issues? Or you know how much I paid for that appointment? And who’s a eunuch if—

COUNCILLOR FOR COOPERATIVES: And what of you! Is it the burden of plunder from the UPE buildings project that keeps you stunted?

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: All because I refuse to let you encroach on the school lands for your poultry scheme.

COUNCILLOR FOR COOPERATIVES: I have told you again and again. You can come into it if you want, I have left you the first choice over 30% or the remaining shares.

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: Who wants that ant’s morsel? You can keep it.

I remember offering you 45% ownership of Morise Construction Company when we were going to rehabilitate the Council roads.

COUNCILLOR FOR MAGISTRATE: What happened to the money sent from Lagos for all the UPE buildings? For all we know, that's why the Commissioner is coming here.

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: You know very well that the plans of those buildings are all ready in my office. You saw the beautiful designs.

COUNCILLOR FOR COOPERATIVES: Is it inside the plans that the children will learn to read and write? School's supposed to be starting next week.

COUNCILLOR FOR EDUCATION: So what! Rome was not built in a day. Go and bring your Commissioner here to catch me since I see that this is all a conspiracy. Many eminent men have gone to prison before and have come out only to be Heads of State. Bring your Commissioner, but just make sure that when he's here he doesn't take a look also at OFN Accounts.

Even, the Chairman of the Council distributes goats and mirrors to entice the electorate. His wife has just opened a boutique with donations from the people of the town. To him, "no one is to take any bribes at all except with specific clearance from me." (16) He is fully aware that all the responsibility for expedition in the Council will naturally fall on him. He therefore orders that all files on UPE contracts be burnt before the arrival of Solarin.

The hospital is not left out. The Doctor in charge shirks in his responsibility and the hospital suffers irremediably from congestion, lack of regular baths for the patients, the mortuary is even more congested and the mortuary attendants make their living out of it. Shockingly, corpses litter the floor. Government has voted a lot of money for this which has been diverted into private purses. Yet the Doctor says he has no skeleton in his cupboard.

Even the judiciary is not left out, the Chief Magistrate orders the poultry attendants to take some of the fowls from the OFN poultry to his house for dinner. Besides, the Chief Magistrate is a cult man. This exposes the absurd situation that is prevalent in our society among the highly placed officials of government. In 2011, the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi and the President of the Court of Appeal in Nigeria, Justice Ayo Salami were investigated on the allegations of corruption and abuse of office. We recall Jigi's concern about the greed of office holders in Osofisan's *Esu and the Vagabond Minstrels* (1991): "In those days you talk of, there was a different God in this land. The locusts had not come to power. The priests of austerity, drought and perennial shortages. The greedy men with their gleaning teeth, calling themselves politicians." (7)

The poor are usually at the receiving end. They suffer the consequences of the reckless spending made by the elite class. The five vagabond minstrels suffer hunger

and deprivation because the locusts are in power. Government hospitals are in shambles and the poor patients suffer untold hardships because of the recklessness of the elite.

The Price Control Officer in *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* does nothing but to soar the price of goods. She sends her men to raid the market and goods confiscated end up in her home. The Chairman and his officials look for a way of hiding all their fraudulent practices. They thus decide to engage the service of Baba Fawomi, an Ifa Priest. An Ifa priest according to the Yoruba tradition who is supposed to be an epitome of wisdom, decency and discipline turns out to be an embodiment of greed and dishonesty.

The Ifa Priest is aware of the predicament in which the government officials are, and he decides to take advantage of the situation and use it to serve his own selfish interest. The Ifa priest agrees to help them to prevent Solarin from coming. To do this, he demands five cows each from the people for the sacrifice, plus ten goats, of the home-grown type all black and fat. He also asks the Price Control Officer to bring sixteen fowls strong limbed, home raised chickens and seven bales of white cloth by each of them, Sanyan with attractive design for the actual ceremony. Besides, the Ifa priest drinks greedily. The corruption of all the local government officials in this play compares with the depravity and graft of Chief Owombe in *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage* (1986), a Minister in the government who corruptly enriches himself and suddenly becomes a millionaire.

Osofisan also satirizes religious hypocrisy in the society. Pastor Nebuchadnezzar is overcome by his fear of Solarin because he has embezzled the Church's money. Besides, he wears a charm. Pastor Nebuchadnezzar is the type of Pastor Suuru in *Midnight Hotel* (1986) while Baba Fawomi, the Ifa priest, is the type of Baba Soye, the Ifa priest in *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, a man that divines for people through manipulation and craftiness. Osofisan exposes the corrupt and hypocritical behaviour of Pastor Suuru, a religious leader, who is expected to lay a good example for others to follow, but who perverts Christianity to acquire material wealth as he indulges in drunkenness, smoking, embezzlement and getting of contracts. Even the choice of a hostel as the setting of the play, a place that is synonymous with rotteness, sexual immorality and social decadence is to further show the level of moral failure and social corruption in the Nigerian society.

As the play progresses, the Chairman is deceived by his security operatives who pretend to be beggars that Solarin has arrived in the town. In actual sense, the stranger is not Solarin but one Ishola Oriebora, a Lagos rogue who runs from his landlord on account of his debts and the attempt to probe him. On his way, he is attacked by robbers. He eventually finds succour and comfort in the vicarage in the town. As soon as he realizes that he is being mistaken for Solarin, he quickly assumes the role of Solarin, the Public Complaints Commissioner. The play can then be seen from this moment as a drama of mistaken identity.

Pastor, in whose vicarage Ishola lodges, has no choice but to accommodate the strange visitor since he too has just stolen church money. The visitor deflowers the Pastor's daughter, Cecilia and a wedding is hurriedly arranged. All the corrupt officials in the Council use the opportunity to give their generous donations to the rogue. This is an attempt to bribe the "Commissioner" from probing them. This is what is known in modern Nigerian parlance as the "settlement syndrome".

The Chairman is jolted when the true identity of the man from Lagos is revealed through his diary. He is surprised that a young man like that can outsmart him in spite of his thirty years' experience in politics. He therefore promises to retire since the younger crooks have taken over. Meanwhile, the Chairman sacks the two beggars for giving him false information. Despite their successful game of craft, Sammy Johnson says "But they are beaten in their own game by an upstart." (41)

The play succeeds because of the style of humour employed by Osofisan. Lanrele Bamidele has thus described the playwright as a "cracker-barrel humorist" because "he is sharp in mother wit, and as a person he learns the technique of anecdotes, homily, metaphor [...] orthography and grotesque misspellings that may tilt towards the burlesque." (71)

It was during Babangida's regime that Tai Solarin was again made the Chairman, the People's Bank of Nigeria, ostensibly in recognition of his outstanding performance as a public officer, a social commentator and critic. Tai Solarin accepted to serve his dear nation. But he was shocked with the developments that he found in the People's Bank which led eventually to his resignation as Chairman.

A report in the *Nigerian Tribune* (May 20, 1993) gives an insight as to Tai Solarin's resignation:

Irked by large scale corruption and financial impropriety in the People's Bank and apparent lukewarm response to them, resigned his chairmanship of the bank. He was resigning "for one reason—to arrest the tardiness, possibly the unwillingness to arraign before the court of law, the members of staff that looted the People's Bank and made away with millions of naira that was intended for the common man. At the end of January last year [1991] out of the ₦80,785,867.00 loans disbursed, ₦29,328,897.72 was on record as having been repaid, but only a paltry ₦8,889,335.04 had been remitted to the bank's headquarters. For instance, as at that date, a breakdown of cash flow showed that although Kano Zone recorded ₦9,832,840.00, ₦4,261,59 was recorded as actual repayment but no money was remitted to the bank's headquarters. (FP)

The main character in *Who's Afraid of Solarin?* is projected as the epitome of honesty and perfection. In an interview with Femi Osofisan, I asked him if Tai Solarin was a completely honest and incorruptible Nigerian because his romance with General Babangida when he was Chairman of the People's Bank of Nigeria was criticized by

the public especially when he put on the same attire with Maryam Babangida instead of his usual khaki shirt and shorts outfit. Osofisan responded:

Yes! So what? You've singled out one incident in one man's whole life. Then you used that one to judge him. So I mean, you have to put things in their right proportion and when you say somebody is a model of honesty, model of integrity, it doesn't mean that hundred percent all his life, twenty four hours, he didn't make any error, he didn't tell a lie. The model is that for the rest part of his life, this is what he tried, preached, this is what he tried to live by. You preached something and you tried to live by it. That is why the person becomes a model, a hero, not that he preached something and he is doing something else. You preach something and you stand by it and particularly when there are difficulties, when there are dangers, you stick to what you believe and you say this is what is right for human beings. As far as I know, Tai is intact. Now, even when he was misled by Babangida, it was because he thought he believed he was doing it for the masses which he tried to help [...] The fault is Babangida's not Solarin's at all. The man went there to try and serve humanity. He didn't go there to enrich himself [...] He didn't know that it was a game of deception [...] As soon as he found out, what did he do? He left and started carrying placards. So what more do you want of anybody?

In *Altine's Wrath* (1986), Osofisan further depicts the issue of gratification or ten percent in the award of contracts. This is shown in the contract agreement terms between Alhaji Maikudi and Lawal Jatau, a Permanent Secretary in one of the State Ministries. There is a disagreement between the two over what should be the percentage of the total amount to be paid to the contractor that should go to the coffer of Law Jatau. Lawal is insisting on twenty percent from Alhaji Maikudi based on the initial agreement while Alhaji Maikudi is offering ten percent. Lawal refuses to accept the ten percent and tells his business associate frankly: "Rubbish! Tell him it's complete rubbish! What decade does he think we're living in? Who, in any Ministry whatsoever, does he think will accept ten percent indeed! It's not even enough to pay the junior boys their share, the boys who'll be carrying your files to and fro!" (*Altine* 74)

It is even embarrassing to know that Alhaji Maikudi does not know anything about the technical aspect of the job. He is a mere errand boy for the company. He confesses this to Lawal:

I've been to every one of those places to get them to sign a contract or to pay them their kickback! That's my job to chase people around, and bring contracts to the company. But how the jobs are executed, that's not my area at all! My partner, it's my partner who knows about the technical details and supervises all the projects [...] And now he says he doesn't know what particular role you'll be playing with your twenty percent. (*Altine* 74)

Osofisan reechoes a similar situation in *Aringindin and the Nightwatchmen* (1992) where the likes of Lawal Jatau and Alhaji Maikuti are depicted. These are the shop owners like Orisatoba, Bimbola Dare, Fatosin and Elebute who use their positions and businesses to create artificial scarcity and inflation while the poor continue to suffer. Ayinde, a school teacher in the play openly castigates them: "These vultures, at will, created scarcity and inflation so that swelling banknotes may continuously glut their bloated stomachs [...] let them rot now!" (*Aringindin* 29)

Osofisan thus openly exposes bribery and corruption, hoarding, artificial scarcity in the public service. Men who are entrusted with high responsibility betray the trust reposed in them. Contracts are awarded not on merit but on the highest bidder and on whom you know. To Lawal, the business of ten percent is the harvest of his long years at work and that is what he is going on. It is also a means of augmenting his salary. He does not see anything wrong in taking kickbacks. Today, taking kickbacks or ten percent is the vogue in both private and public sectors. This is openly denounced by Osofisan.

We also recall here Chinwe, the house help of the Juokwus in *The Album of the Midnight Blackout* (1994) who insists on taking a bribe before she can run an errand of letter delivery:

JUOKWU: How much did madam give you?

CHINWE: In which other home, Chinwe! Have you seen a house maid taking money like this to betray her master? [...] Here, take this twenty naira at once! [...] You will forget about madam's ten naira from now on, you hear? Bribery's such a dirty thing! Just take the twenty naira, and in future you will bring my letter directly to me.

CHINWE: In fact, if you could add just another twenty sir, to make it a round forty naira, I can be bringing madam's own letters to you first, sir... (*Album* 20)

Similarly, the corruption of Chief Ekuroola, Chief Orousi and Prince Lanusen in *Another Raft* (1989) is brought into the open. Osofisan portrays these people who represent the elite as corrupt, unjust and oppressive. They parallel the corruption of Councillor for Education, Councillor for Co-operatives, Price Control Officer in *Who's Afraid of Solarin?*

They embezzle and direct public funds that are meant for the welfare of the people into their personal accounts. Prince Lanusen misappropriates the money that is meant to provide good drainage in his local council area. This is why Chief Ekuroola questions the unexecuted flood canals projects which have already been paid for many years ago: "But your Council could have started with building a good drainage for instance, Lanusen. You know the money was voted, the plan approved. The records also show that the money was spent. Years ago." (*Raft* 24)

Besides, like Jimoh in *Midnight Hotel* (1986) who is title crazy and who insists that everybody must address him as Chief Jimoh a honorary Chieftaincy title bestowed

upon him by the people of Ifetedo, Ekuroola, because of his obsession for Chieftaincy titles bribes every member of the Chieftaincy-Award-Committee including Lanusen using money and building of houses in order to win their support. Ekuroola reminds Lanusen of this when he says: "You had no choice, it was the title of my fathers and my grandfathers! And I paid you well for it, damn it! It was my money that made you change your mind, Lanusen! The house I built for you in Alagbede quarters, your sixth wife still lives there! Deny it!" (*Midnight* 25)

Osofisan further pursues the issue of corruption in *Birthdays are not for Dying* (1990). His concern in this play is the depiction of the craze for wealth, greed and the oppression of the poor. Kunle the focus in the play insists on enforcing his father's will that empowers him to take over the leadership of his father's company on his thirtieth birthday.

Mother warns him to give up the company matter because those who killed his father are very much around to do the same to him too. To Kunle, mama is old fashioned. He is in a new world. Kunle thus concludes arrangement to take over the company. All the necessary papers have been signed. There are oppositions especially from Major Ajaka who insists that Kunle being a baby is incapable of taking over the company. The removal of Major Ajaka unilaterally from the Board of the company by Kunle worsens the situation. Even though Kunle receives many gifts on the anniversary of his birthday, the celebration ends up in tragedy.

On Kunle's thirtieth birthday, he presides over the Board meeting of the company and tells the Board of his determination to take over the company as its president. The members are provoked and want to buy off the company from Kunle instead. Major Ajaka a man who is very desperate refuses to accept the leadership of Kunle and decides to strangle him. This results in the death of Kunle.

Kunle before his death says that life is full of cannibals and only the toughest survive. It is wickedness for people to kill because of wealth. Kunle's father is killed supposedly because of his wealth. His son too is killed because of his father's wealth bequeathed to him. Even when the will that empowers Kunle to take over the leadership of the company has been signed by a lawyer and it is even made open to all, yet, the Board members refuse to accept the authority of the will of Kunle's father. They are bent on dispossessing Kunle of his father's property. This is utter disregard for the rule of law. The action is barbaric. True! The world is full of cannibals indeed.

Kunle on the other hand acknowledges the fact that he is rich already but he is of the desire to become richer. He refuses all the honourable appeals that his mother gives him. Since he is the toughest, he does not survive in the hands of the cannibals. He is a mere weakling, a boaster and a "dumbclot" as Honourable calls him. (*Birthdays* 34)

In *The Inspector and the Hero* (1990), Aduke, the wife of Chief Ereniyi Eson engages in all manners of shady businesses such as smuggling of contraband goods into the country using fake names and secret bank accounts. Any attempt to expose her

fraudulent activities is always resisted with violence. She even goes to bed with men. Her husband, Chief Ereniyi a gubernatorial candidate is reported to have killed a young innocent boy straight from the Youth Corps Service because he attempts to report the events surrounding the missing lorries containing the seized contraband goods. Obviously, Chief Ereniyi and his wife are behind it all.

Some of the charges levelled against the Esons are reported by Inspector Akindele and his assistant, Coral:

CORAL: (reading from document)... let's see. On 15 November, last year, a sum of ₦20, 000 was paid into your account by one Mr. Latinwo.

AKINDELE: Do you know him madam?

(Silence)

CORAL: (as before): 5, January, another sum of ₦10, 000 is paid in, this time by Dr. B. Peterson.

AKINDELE: Again, this one interests me. If you remember, the date 5 January, is the day AFTER that "miserable third class officer" as you call him, is found dead near your office, Chief. A day earlier, on 3 January, he had intercepted a large consignment of contraband during a rather unusual blackout at the border. Coincidence again? Go on. Coral.

CORAL: 13 January, the same Dr. B. Peterson pays into the account, a sum of ₦15, 000.

AKINDELE: Always large sums. What kind of business, and so lucrative a business, did you carry on with Dr. Peterson, Madam? Or is it too early to ask? (Silence) Go on Coral.

CORAL: 24 February, a sum of ₦41, 000 paid into the same account by one Alhaji Ahmadu Gao.

AKINDELE: ₦41, 000! Noted. Go on.

CORAL: We move on to March. On 7 March, a sum of ₦70, 000 paid in, again by our Dr. B. Peterson.

AKINDELE: Stop there a minute. Madam, you know what makes these payments interesting? I'll tell you. On 9, March two days after the last payment read out by Coral, both Alhaji Gao and Dr. Peterson, those extremely prosperous customers of yours, are arrested in Kano. Because for a long time, we had our eyes on them. But again, like a bad film repeating itself, both of them die before proper interrogation. They were being brought down to Lagos by train-imagine! Not by air, mind you, but by train!... but by the time the train arrives in Lagos, Chief, Madomi you know the story! The two suspects are found in their cabin, dead! Of food poisoning! Very convenient deaths gain, thank you. Your customers, madam, they have such high rates of mortality! (Fiercely) Go on, Coral Go on to the last bit, Spare us the rest of the horror!

CORAL: JUNE, Sir, And here it is. On 17 June, a stunning payment into the account of the sum of two million and forty thousand!

AKINDELE: Two million plus! In one day! Even the manager had to report that.

That's how we came into it.

CORAL: (closing file): That's all Sir. (*Inspector* 117–20)

Consequently, Chief Ereniyi is arrested. His wife, Aduke, a onetime police officer is thrown into panic and offers a bribe to Inspector Akindele but, committed to the cause of his profession, he refuses and insists on prosecuting the Esons:

ADUKE: (running round frantically): Please! Please! Spare him! Please! I'll pay you anything! Anything! See? (She runs for her bag and empties it out. Currency notes and jewels tumble on the floor). All of it for you! And more! All my gold! All our money, have it all! (Runs to drawer, pulls out false bottom, again, notes and jewels fall down. Please! For my sake! For the sake of our children! Our friends! His mother! Mercy for the sake of God [...])

AKINDELE (hard): No, madam. It's murder. It cannot be done... that's why I joined the Force, Madam, to fight it the little way I can. No one has to live compulsorily by the rules of beasts [...] You think money is all that matters. Money and power [...] I'm sorry for you. You just won't accept that some of us can dedicate our lives to cleaning up the mess you and your kind insist on making all over the place? I have no choice in the matter. The oath I took does not make room for exemptions. Not even friendship will I accept as a bribe [...] You're trying to corrupt me. (*Inspector* 137, 139, 142–43)

Osofisan frowns at corruption, injustice and oppression in the society. All attempts must be made to resist them or else the life of the nation will remain in danger. Osofisan, in *Sunday Times* (October 22, 1985) describes Nigeria and says: "this is a vast and ruthless battle field, filled with corrupt and murderous officials, bribe-hunting policemen, reckless drivers, con-men and touts, thugs and various other violent men living beyond the law." (5)

The likes of the Esons must be fished out and brought to book no matter their level of influence and connection in the society. Such is therefore possible if we have able and fearless and incorruptible leaders who are determined to live and lead by example. This is a leader who can stand upright in the face of temptations, threats and dangers and stand by the oath of his office. With a leader like this in place, the future of Nigeria can be guaranteed.

Osofisan is very optimistic that such leaders can arise. He portrays Inspector Akindele and his assistant, Coral as good examples of true leaders. As stinking as the Police Force is today, Osofisan is of the view that it can be sanitized. Certain individuals like Inspector Akindele can emerge to wipe out the greedy, callous and merciless Esons who are not interested in the welfare of the people but in their destruction. This is what Femi Osofisan envisions in his plays as a creative artist, devoted

indefatigably and doggedly, to using the platform of drama to fight graft and corruption in the society.

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