

Marxism and the Gradual Shift in Paradigm: A Reading of Olu Obafemi's *Wheels*

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Abstract : *Marxism, which is a socio-political movement rooted in the bifurcation of society into bourgeois and proletariat classes, holds that capitalism births societal ills such as poverty, oppression, suffering, and exploitation. The historical narrative linked to this school of thought is characterised by an enduring struggle between oppressors and the oppressed. In this regard, exponents of this philosophy tend to envisage transformative social changes to emerge from this conflict. In contradistinction to the perpetual tension customarily typical of traditional Marxist texts, Obafemi's Wheels introduces a novel perspective, which interrogates the conventional narrative. This study employs the Marxist and postmodernist theories along with content analysis to analyse the Marxist imperatives and evolving paradigm within Marxist ideology, as evident in the study text. The research findings indicate that there is a departure from conventional Marxist tenets, where the resolution of the antagonism between oppressors and the oppressed is typically absent. Instead, what we perceive is a gradual shift, which suggests a departure from the normative encouragement for the oppressed to rise against their oppressors. The findings further show a growing recognition that dialogue can offer a more constructive avenue for conflict resolution, particularly when confrontations may jeopardize the survival of both parties. It is concluded that there are compelling pieces of evidence of a gradual departure from the established norms in traditional Marxist discourse, thereby signaling a fundamental evolution in perspectives in terms of conflict resolution in class society.*

Keywords: *Marxist tenets, Postmodernism, Shifting paradigm, Social change, the bourgeois, the proletariat.*

1. INTRODUCTION :

The Marxist Literary theory was developed from the theories of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, who believed that human history consisted of struggles between social classes—the oppressors versus the oppressed, the bourgeoisie versus the proletariat. The theory developed “in response to the European industrial revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (Shija 150). It holds that at the core of their relationship, is the struggle for the distribution of resources which consequently creates what is considered the base (the social relationship between men which creates and produce materials that are eventually put up for exchange) and the superstructure (law, politics religion which legitimises the power of the social classes that are formed in the base) obtainable in most capitalist societies (Lewers 1). Marxists are convinced that, “Through the instrumentality of ideology or the ideas of the ruling class, societies confer supremacy to the ruling class and subjugate the masses in such a manner that seems justifiable or natural or just.”(Shija 15). In the preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Karl Marx opines:

In Social production which men carry on, they enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, these relations of production corresponds to a definite stage of development of their material powers of production. The totality of the relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which legal and political superstructures arise and to which definite forms of social consciousness correspond... (Lisman 73)

The intricacies of the base, where relationships are founded based on those who control resources and the means of production versus those who exchange their labour for wages, create class-stratified societies. The divide between

the owners of the means of production and providers of labour creates the superstructure which uses law, politics, and religious ideologies that have been created to legitimise the power of the ruling class, as Marx states:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every age the ruling ideas, i.e., the class which is the dominant material force in the society is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production so that in consequence the ideas of those who lack the mental production are subject to it. The dominant ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationship. (Lisman 74)

The relationship between the base and the superstructure has generated some divergent views among Marxist critics. A fraction of these critics believe that literature is a product of the superstructure that the base largely determines, hence representing the dominant ideas and values of the few who control the means of production and is, at its best, an instrument that legitimises the control of the oppressor. Other Marxist critics think that all works of literature are political; it only depends on whose politics is being advanced, as Ngugi asserts:

... Literature cannot escape from the class power struggle that shapes everyday life. Here, a writer has no choice. Whether or not he is aware of it. His works reflect one or more aspects of intense economic, political, cultural, and ideological struggles in a society. What he can choose is one side in the battle field, the side of the people or the side of the social forces and classes that try to keep the people down. What he cannot do is to remain neutral. Every writer is a writer in Politics. The question is, what and whose politics? (Preface)

The quotation above suggests that a writer can use literature to reflect the ideologies of the dominant few by using their writings to further impose these ideologies on the masses or as tools that expose social injustices and oppression meted out to the masses to effect a social change.

The Marxist literary theory is a theory that appraises a literary work based on the themes of class stratification, alienation, oppression, exploitation, social injustice, and the conflicts between the oppressors and the oppressed, as reflected in the work. For the Marxist critic, literature is another battleground to contend against the oppression of the masses, hence emphasis is placed on the writer's presentation of the characters who should be drawn from various classes in the society as Ngugi opines, "Literature does not grow or develop in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society" (Preface xv).

A Marxist critic believes that literature must reflect the social, political and economic situations of the society from which it emanates. To him, a writer who is genuinely committed to his art must, without fear, expose the idiosyncrasies of the oppressors who always want to keep the masses under their control. The Proponents of the Marxist literary theory also believe that it is not enough for a writer to reflect his society's social realities. Instead, they must also let society know on whose side they belong, as Chidi Amuta asserts:

What is important is not only the writer's honesty and faithfulness in capturing and reflecting the struggles around him, but also his attitude to those big social and political issues...what we are talking about is whether or not a writer's imaginative leap to grasp reality is aimed at helping, or hindering, the community's struggle for a certain quality of life free from all parasitic exploitative relations. We are talking about the relevance of literature to our daily struggle for the right and security to bread, shelter, clothes, song, and the right of the people to the product of their sweat. The extent to which the writer can help in not only explaining the world but in changing it will depend on his appreciation of the classes and the values that are struggling for new order, a new society or a more human future, and which classes and values are hindering the birth of the new and the hopeful. And of course it depends on which side he is in these struggles of his time. (478)

The writer is, therefore, expected to be the mouthpiece of the masses who may not even be aware that they are being oppressed or may not know how to resist their oppressors. Some pertinent questions that must be answered when using Marxist literary criticism are: What role does class play in the work? How does the author analyse these class relations? Does the work serve as propaganda for the status quo, or does it undermine it? How does the author reflect oppression and social conflict? Moreover, what is his attitude towards the plights of the masses? How do the characters overcome oppression? Furthermore, to what extent does the writer proffer solutions to the problems reflected in the work?

Marxist literary criticism dominated the African literary space for a long time following the nature of the themes explored by African writers. Today, we are gradually witnessing a decline in the engagement of this literary criticism because African literature of the postmodern age is gradually shifting from class issues to reflecting the issues that constitute the present realities of the postmodern world. This is also an era that challenges the notions of orderliness, religion, morality, laws, and rational thoughts, now seen as avenues through which governments establish and legitimise their powers and control over the majority.

The rise in technology and the mass media in the postmodern age has made it possible for information to travel at the speed of light, causing information exchange to gain momentum and making it possible for people to see what is obtainable in other climes, hence the dwindling of the concepts of universal ideas or truths. Based on the new realities, people started to witness the collapse of established ideologies; for example, they discovered that scholars had begun to challenge ideologies that were once believed to hold the solutions to man's problems.

Furthermore, scholars began to perceive the loopholes and failures of ideologies around the world; for example, communism has failed to defeat capitalism, and religion has become another tool to enslave the people, making it necessary for people to begin to liberate themselves from the narratives that enslaved them both physically and mentally. It is on this premise that the world is beginning to see a shift in terms of the themes explored and the culture presented in postmodern writing, as Bran Nicol posits:

Postmodern writing challenges us because it requires its readers to be an active creator of meaning rather than a passive consumer. More than this, it challenges its readers to interrogate common sense and commonplace assumptions about literature which prevail in our culture...To read the postmodern fiction is to be invited to ask: What is fiction? What does reading involve? Why do they create innovative experimental forms rather than just stick to traditional ones? (Cited in Shija 3)

A postmodern work of literature advocates the liberation of people, whose lives would otherwise have been regulated by what Jean-Francois Lyotard termed “grand norms” or “grand narratives,” “from the sense of false organisation, rational thoughts, ideology and concepts of truths presented in grand norms. In a nutshell, postmodern writing encourages people to be critical thinkers by encouraging them to interrogate the culture of acceptance” (Omojuyigbe & Adegoke 54). The attempt to question universal truths, rational thoughts, morality and faith, justice and norms explains African fiction's gradual shift from class to mass perspectives.

The impact of the postmodern culture on Africa is progressively shifting the focus of African writers and critics who are now coming to the realisation that the Marxist literary theory is becoming inadequate in evaluating the postmodern African fiction. Against this backdrop, this research paper examines the gradual shift in traditional Marxist ideological belief regarding the relations between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat in the capitalist society of Obafemi's *Wheels*.

2. A Brief Background to Marxist Writings in Nigeria

Many Nigerian writers who are Marxist by inclination have used their works to educate the masses on the issues of oppression, social injustice, corruption and other social vices to spur them to effect a change to their situation. This has become a necessary step since African leaders have continued to polarise the masses along ethnic and religious lines, a strategy that has allowed these leaders to continue to perpetrate their evils. Some writers, such as Obafemi, Niyi Osundare, and Festus Iyayi, who are of the Marxist block, have used their works to speak against the oppression of the masses. They have also not relented in exposing the dehumanising conditions that the masses are subjected to, which ultimately prevent these masses from standing up against their oppressors, as captured succinctly in this quotation by Beyaraza states: “Unfortunately, the African peoples have been subjected to so much indoctrination, conditioning, humiliation and sometimes dehumanisation that they have been forced to accept even what should not be tolerated in normal circumstances... certainly, often there have been demonstrations against certain regimes, but this has always been long after the people have suffered a beyond description... results of learning the hard way” (201).

The need to liberate the masses is the core of Obafemi's works, centring on the oppression, alienation, poverty and social injustice that pervades Nigerian society and other African states. Obafemi, in his works, exposes the challenges of the masses in Africa as he reflects in the author's note in his play *Naira Has No Gender*, where he opines

I have chosen an ostensibly trivial part-domestic, part-social issues in this play to examine how conscious (socially and politically) individuals confront the reality of daily existence in a bankrupt, cynical and dysfunctional social order. Fulfilment of human aspirations (as simple as the “socially intricate” of getting married) has become a far cry for the ordinary man” almost as luxurious as obtaining daily meals. (5)

From this quotation, Obafemi affirms his commitment to exposing the economic and social realities of the masses. For Obafemi, literature is a viable tool for educating the masses on their predicaments, as he reiterates in the author's note on *Suicide Syndrome* where he states

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

Literature, for Obafemi, remains an avenue for exposing the social injustices, class stratification and oppression that pervades the Nigerian society. It is also a tool to educate the masses about the causes of their plights and proffer solutions that will culminate in a change in their situation. Against this background, this research paper explores Obafemi's *Wheels* as a Marxist literary piece, demonstrating how it projects a gradual shift in the Marxist ideology in postmodern African literature.

3. Marxist Imperatives in Obafemi's *Wheels*

Obafemi in *Wheels* is preoccupied with the issues of class stratification, social injustice, poverty, corruption, distrust and other social vices that characterise the Giro Community. This novel examines how the issues mentioned above affect the relationships among the characters in the text. Obafemi exposes the class stratification that pervades Giro through his characters from different economic classes. Sonja and Pa Garuba belong to the poor class and are just trying to survive. On the other hand, Seun, Gbenga and Kemi's parents belong to the affluent class. These two classes of people presented live wildly divergent lives. Though they all live in the same Giro community, a bridge divides them. On the one side, where Gbenga and Kemi live, there are beautiful houses with beautiful cars, with a pleasant aroma of food often emanating from there. On the other side, where Sonja and other poor people reside, there are no beautiful houses; the best houses there are the 'face me if you can' houses where toilets and bathrooms are shared. According to Kofo, the narrator of the text, the children of the poor "always go for clean and very good breath, smell sweet air from the houses of the rich people across the bridge" (32). This distinction is typical of Marxist literature, where the writer aims to show the imbalance of economic powers between the rich and the poor.

One of the reasons for the sharp contrast between the quality of life of Giro's rich and poor is the selfishness of the rich, as we see from the events recounted by Sonja (Kofo's father). According to Sonja, his economic status worsened after he was forcefully retired from the Military because he had very little education after returning from the war. Sonja thinks his retirement is an unjust treatment, considering that he put his life on the line while defending his country at the war front. To make matters worse, he is paid only 30 pounds as a retirement benefit. This money is insufficient for him to give his family a decent life. Sonja's annoyance is further heightened by Senior Military Officers who were never at the battlefield but in their hotel rooms sipping wine in the company of beautiful women who now live better lives than he and his friends at the battlefield. These senior military officers have built beautiful houses, have luxurious cars and can afford to give their wives and children a good life, as Sonja recounts:

I Musa. I went to war. I fight well. I was even rewarded with field promotion to the rank of field officer, Second Lieutenant and decorated with medals, like those old soldiers who went to fight the white man's war in Burma and Germany... Well, at the end of the war, the officer's rank was removed. They said I had no book certificate. They said I was not trained, not commissioned. Hmm. I Musa who took all the daring risks expected only from lions. Yes I was demoted to a mere corporal and retired with a small pension, because I had only Primary Three. (24)

This mistreatment from the Military creates a sense of distrust in the system in Musa, who feels used and cheated as he opines, "When I faced Egbunike, the powerful man-made bomb in Akwa, nobody was there to remind that I had no certificate" (24). Sonja also decries the injustice in the Military where the Generals and the Colonels are given preferential treatment and junior officers are made to believe it is their responsibility to protect them, as captured in the lines below:

He remembered the Colonels and the Generals who gave all the big big orders. They stayed away in their homes while we went to face the enemy's fire. Generals must not die. If they die, the war ends. As we protected them with our skins, they stayed in their furnished hotels, sometimes fighting the war on the maps in the midst of red wines and in the company of fat-arsed girls... As we died in our hundreds and thousands, they increased their own salaries with the money saved from our deaths. (25)

Sonja laments this inequality that makes lower-ranking officers lay down their own lives to protect the senior officers, who do not even go to the war front nor appreciate the efforts of the junior officers. At the end of the war, these junior officers have nothing to show for all the efforts they put into the war, but the senior officers "got new postings and built better houses" (25).

Obafemi's juxtaposition of the characters from the two classes of people found in Giro brings the issues of class stratification within Nigerian society to the fore, where the poor live in squalor, and the rich live a life of opulence. In every major city in Nigeria, it is effortless to distinguish environments inhabited by the poor from those of the rich. The rich always have access to a good road network, electricity, clean water and other basic amenities. The irony in this case is that even when the rich and the poor may live in the same locality as we see in the Giro community, the living conditions will be different. A typical example of this can be seen in Asokoro-Abuja, Nigeria. Asokoro houses two different categories of people. There is the cosy part of Asokoro with all the social amenities mentioned earlier, and impoverished

people inhabit the ghetto part of Asokoro called Kurumduma, just like the rich and the poor areas are divided by a bridge in Giro community. A road also divides highbrow Asokoro from the ghetto Asokoro.

Obafemi's style in *Wheels* is a replica of what obtains Marxist narratives. *Wheels* is a novel about social injustice, class stratification, poverty, corruption and other social vices. The text's physical setting is appropriate in that it portrays the inequality in terms of the social class of the characters in the text. The Giro community is divided into two parts, separated by a bridge. The rich live in the beautiful part of the town where there are gigantic and grand buildings with beautiful cars parked at the garages of these homes, while the poor live in the ghetto part of the community, where the people do not have the necessities of life such as good toilets and a hygienic environment. The contrast between both parts of Giro is so glaring that even the child narrator, Kofo, states, "... we children always go for clean and very good breath, smell sweet air from the houses of the rich people across the bridge" (32).

The disparity in the places where the poor and the rich live underscores the class stratification in many societies in the world. The periodic background/setting of the text, which is situated after the Nigerian Civil War and the discovery of crude oil in Nigeria, exposes the social injustices that characterise the Military system and how the discovery of crude oil further fuelled corruption in Nigeria.

Obafemi draws his characters from the two dominant economic classes in Nigeria, which is typical of what is obtainable in most Marxist texts where characters are drawn from the two dominant classes: the rich and the poor or the oppressors and the oppressed, as the case may be. Sonja and Pa Garuba represent the poor, and Seun and Gbenga's fathers represent the rich. The relationship dynamics between these two classes in the text are marked with hostilities and distrust, often leading to clashes. This is typical of the relationship between social classes in class literature. Sonja and Pa Garuba harbour a high level of distrust for the rich people of Giro, perceiving them as the source of their predicament; they do not want anything to do with the rich.

4. Shifting Paradigm in Marxist Tenets

Having presented the realities typical of Marxist narratives, Obafemi, in stark contrast to the traditional Marxist worldview, departs from the norm by deploying the young characters in the text to proffer likely solutions to the hostilities between the two dominant classes. Kofo, Kemi, Seun and Gbenga only see a meaningful future in the Giro community if they attempt to change the dynamics of the relationship between their parents. They attempt to make the future of their community better by trying to unite their parents. Even though the parents do not wholly sheathe their swords, they agree to be civil towards one another for the sake of their children. This vision is pursued through the advocacy for reconciliation and peaceful co-existence between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie in the Giro Community, pointing to the fact that it is almost impossible for them to exist without each other. For example, their children attend the same school, play with each other, help one another with their studies, and even fall in love with one another, as we see in the case of Kofo and Kemi.

Moreover, Kofo receives a love letter from Kemi, and he is perplexed about Kemi's love interest towards him communicated through the letter. His reaction is that of unbelief and fear. Kofo cannot believe that Kemi can develop that feeling for him. He is confused about why she would pick him as a poor man's son and not one of her wealthy friends. He wonders why she did not pick Seun, whom she had always been closer to and who also comes from the same social and economic background as her. He states, "They belong together. Children of rich parents, with all things in abundance. They rode to school in very posh cars. They have common interests, common values as children of big people" (84). Kofo does not see how two people so far apart in terms of their social class can fall in love as he puzzles himself

Love, what love? What has love to do with all these? What love can there be between two people who are so far apart? What could she have seen in me that would make her commit this crime of writing me? Would she be bold enough to walk with me publicly in the village? Won't her rich parents disown her? No, I have no right to take her through all that. (84-85)

Kofo understands the segregation between the rich and the poor so much that he does not think any love interest between him and Kemi will work. This belief is also re-echoed by Achor (Kofo's classmate), who tells Kofo to "Wait until you are caught sneaking into their rich compound by the father of the young girl, you poor boy of no consequence" (86).

The younger generation in Giro soon begins to realise that the alienation between the rich and the poor will only make things worse, and they try to bridge the gap on an occasion when Kofo returns home very late. His father berates him for staying out late with rich people's children, whom he refers to as "baby wolves who promise to devour our land" and Kofo tries to defend his friends by stating: "My friends are innocent. They are not part of their parents' wrong deeds" (115). Sonja will not have any of Kofo's excuses as he ferociously warns Kofo, "Grow up ...grow...Grow... before they turn you into a beast like them" (115). Kofo does not think that alienation is the solution to the problem, as he laments: "This needless show of violence, rage and anger. What will become of us all? This pertinent question sets

the stage for a new cause in the text as he begins to chart a course towards the reconciliation of the poor and the rich in Giro.

Kemi's father also opposes her relationship with Kofo or people of his class, whom he refers to as "children of those brutes. Those never-do-wells. Those blunt heads whose lot is poverty" (117). Kemi tries to defend Kofo and his parents by responding, "No Dad, Kofo's parents are not beasts. They are just poor, that is all. Poverty is not a sin. They did not bring it upon themselves" (118). Her father does not accept everything she says in defence of the poor. Through the characters above, Obafemi champions a new way of resolving the rich and poor crisis. He does not think that hostility and violence will bring the much-desired social change that African writers aim to effect on the continent.

Through the young characters, Kofo and his rich friends, Gbenga, Kemi, and Seun, the author proffers new solutions to the acrimony that exists among their parents as they do not wish to share in the paranoia, as Kofo states:

Papa I know the experiences you our parents are going through. The experiences you have gone through are hard and humiliating. But we don't want to think of it. We don't want to be part of it. Rather, we want to help put the bitterness away...Bitterness keeps the wound fresh and open. Forgiveness heals. (121)

Kofo and his friends think that the bitterness among their parents is dangerous to the future of the Giro community, following the children's conviction about the impossibility of avoiding one another. Thus, the solution to the problem will be to try to live in peace and harmony as Kofo tries to convince his father:

Papa, I have lived through all the difficulty, hardship and poverty which create all these problems and conflicts. All this bitterness. I have been raised and brought up in them. I can feel. I go to school with other poor children who walk barefoot because they cannot afford the money to buy the cheapest tennis shoes. I go to school with rich children brought in flashy cars. But I beat them all at school. They learn at my feet. They the rich and we, the poor walk and work learn and run together in the classrooms and on the fields. If you give us a chance, things will change, even in your lifetime. (122)

The poor people, such as Sonja, may want to see their paranoia as a defence mechanism, but they cannot guarantee its effectiveness in resolving issues. For example, even though the poor people of Giro refused to give their consent to the foreign investors to carry out mechanised farming on their lands, the lands were eventually given out without their consent, as we see Sonja lament.

They have cleared our prime tree. Our palm tree. The source of wealth and joy. The source of oil and fresh wine... Mama Kofo, have you been to Poto, our swampy farm with ashy soil, of late? ...They have levelled it into a plain ground with the new machine called bull-dozer...The roots of our coffee, our cocoa and our Iroko trees have been pulled down by the giant tractor... (120)

Kofo and his friends organise a Reunion and Christmas party, which they use as an avenue to attempt to settle the crises and animosity among their parents. They also propose a debate titled **Between Justice and Exploitation** at the party. Poor and rich parents are given a seat at the high table at the party, something that has never happened in Giro. Kemi urges Kofo to make his opening speech as convincing as possible, as she states

Make sure your statement, your opening speech, is very powerful. Make sure we make the points that the rich ones, the not-so-rich ones get to hear the feelings of we the young generation. Let them know that unity and solidarity in seeking independence is what we need to recapture our land, mineral resources and, more importantly, our dignity from the imperialist and foreign contractors (142)

During the party, there is a disagreement between the rich and the poor parents as Pa Garuba does not support the chairman's advice to the children not to be like their parents who have "suffered from ignorance and poverty, hate, envy and jealousy..." (145). Pa Garuba is displeased that the chairman has failed to see himself and his fellow rich people as the cause of the problems, and he cautions the chairman, "Stop preaching. People like you cause the hatred, the poverty and the ignorance" (145). There is tension in the atmosphere, but the children can resolve the tension. In the course of Pa Garuba's speech, he tries to bring to the fore the causes of the disunity between the rich and the poor and also tries to proffer a solution to the problem as he states

... My children, there are too many falsehoods dressed up in fanciful tongues on our land. Money rules the minds of few in this town.... My children, if it will have meaning, life must be built on truth, good conscience and love... Truth is the hallmark of good culture. Only on this basis will a future friend of betrayal, deceit and oppression be assured on our land. (146)

This statement by Pa Garuba does not sit well with some of the rich people (including the chairman) who leave the meeting. The children admonish the older generation to shun injustice, as Seun states:

Dad, all these injustices breed violence, hatred, resentment and bad blood. A well-fed dog cannot be tolerated in the company of hungry hounds... We the children of these mixed legacies of poverty and wealth which breeds contempt, distrust, frustration and violence must rethink our realities and seek new

solutions. We the children of the future must prepare for a change in our land and in our life time. We want to plant new seedlings which must fruit love. (148)

Unconventionally, the children have refused to walk in their parent's footsteps and have decided to embrace unity, peace, and love, desiring their parents to do the same. They play music and encourage their parents to dance. Mama Kofo goes to the dance floor, soon joined by Pa Garuba and Gbenga's father. This gesture from their parents elates the children, prompting them to join their parents on the dance floor. After the dance, Pa Garuba leaves on his motorbike, while Gbenga's father leaves in his car but not without offering Mama Kofo a lift, which she politely turns down.

The children are happy with the level of civility that now exists among the rich and the poor parents, as Kemi states, "There is a beginning but there is a long road to travel. A very long way to go Kofo. But we must never falter. We must never give up" (150). Kofo agrees it is going to take a while for the crisis between their parents to be resolved but thinks the future is bright as he opines: "Yes not to give up is to win, But we must never underestimate the depth of the gulf, the seriousness of the great divide" (150). Kemi responds, "No, we must not. Only we must not make it deeper than it is. Ours is to begin to fill it up. Bridge the gulf, with determination, with truth and courage" (150). From these conversations between Kemi and Kofo, it is evident that they both understand that bringing peace between the rich and the poor will not be a walk in the park, but they believe that the future can be better. Kemi and Kofo will not let their backgrounds dampen the love that they both share, as Kofo states

I foresee that this love growing between two children will thaw the ice of feelings in Giro. I see new paths opening into the future, cutting through the bridge that divides our two ridges of settlement and linking the streets on both sides into one united home. (158)

Obafemi's deployment of a child narrator allows him to examine the nature of human relationships from two generations. The narration of past events in the story heaps the blame of the predicament of the poor on the rich people, who are portrayed as selfish people. Once Kofo takes over the story's narration, these dynamics change, as we see a more objective reportage of the happenings in the Giro community. Kofo acknowledges the inequality and social injustice across the community but does not heap all the blame on the rich. He also faults the steps the poor took, who have decided to alienate themselves from the rich and are trying to promote that culture among the young. Kofo and his friends realise that the hatred and distrust between the rich and the poor in Giro will not bring meaningful development to the community; hence, they decide to embrace peace, unity and peaceful co-existence. Obafemi uses the child narrator to champion the reconciliation between the social classes in the community

The children's action at the end of *Wheels* suggests that the paranoia and alienation that the older generation has imbibed as their defence mechanisms may not be the solutions to anomalies of class stratification, social injustice, oppression and all the other vices explored in the text. Obafemi suggests that trust, love, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence between the rich and the poor are more potent solutions to bring the much-desired progress to the Giro people and community.

5. Conclusion :

It is evident that Obafemi's *Wheels* embodies the quintessential characteristics of a Marxist narrative. However, it undergoes a notable transformation in its conclusion, thereby shifting from the convention seen in traditional Marxist texts. Towards the end, there is a departure from the norm becomes evident, challenging the typical absence of amicable resolutions to crises between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The fundamental event at the end of the story uncovers a realization among the offspring of the two classes in *Wheels*. They recognize that their collective future and survival are both hinged on their practical engagement in resolving the longstanding conflicts between their respective parents. This departure from the established norm signals a shift from the tradition that encourages the oppressed to rise against their oppressors. Instead, what we see is the singular understanding that dialogue offers a more potent path to conflict resolution, particularly when confrontations pose existential threats to both the oppressed and the oppressors. In essence, the entire narrative lays emphasis on an evolving postmodern perspective wherein dialogue takes precedence over confrontation as a means to resolve conflicts, so as to secure the continued coexistence of both the oppressed and the oppressors in capitalist society.

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