

An Ecofeminist Study of Abubakar's a New Weft in The Loom and Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers

OTANIYI FEHINTOLA ZAINAB (TOLA ZAINAB)¹, A.S. ABUBAKAR²

¹Department of English, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

²Supervising Professor

Abstract- This paper applies the ecofeminist lens to Abdullahi Abubakar's A New Weft in the Loom and Femi Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers. It elucidates how these plays depict the interconnected crises of environmental collapse, social disintegration, and gender oppression in the Nigerian society, through the Yoruba cosmology. Informed by the author's approach to socio-economic, political as well as cultural issues pertaining to the experience of modern Nigerian society the analysis retains its original qualitative literary approach. It situates the narratives within ecofeminist theory, which holds that "the destruction of the environment and the historical oppression of women are deeply linked". Both plays dramatize the consequences of patriarchal greed; economic injustice, environmental disaster, and the utter disregard for womanhood. This paper further highlight the authors' suggestion of women's crucial role in restoring communal harmony: through the findings underscoring that neither environmental nor social problems can be solved in isolation: as one commentator notes, any strategy for change "must take into account its impact on the other". In conclusion, this study reinforces that ethno-cultural unity is a possible way of solving the disintegrated.

Index Terms— Ecofeminism; patriarchy; environmental degradation; women's empowerment; Nigerian drama; indigenous policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigerian drama has long mirrored its society's dilemmas. Evidently, it is safe to say that there is substantial establishment between social context and literary content tantamount to environmental studies.

In the works of Abdullahi Abubakar and Femi Osofisan, cultural heritage, community values, political critique, socioeconomic vices and environmental disintegration are interwoven to comment on contemporary African society. This paper reads Abubakar's A New Weft in the Loom and Osofisan's Once Upon Four Robbers through an ecofeminist framework. Ecofeminism is a socio-political movement emerging in the late 1970 which calls for a new way of thinking about nature, politics, and spirituality. In other words, gender injustice and environmental degradation are seen as mutually reinforcing outcomes of the same oppressive system. Timothy Clark observes that ecofeminism's "defining claim is that the destruction of the environment and the historical oppression of women are deeply linked". This study adopts that perspective to analyze how Abubakar and Osofisan depict a society fractured by the "evil of patriarchy".

Prior scholarship on these plays has examined postcolonial and socio-political themes, but an ecofeminist reading has been absent. By filling this gap, the current analysis remains faithful to the original thesis's findings while aligning with contemporary discourse. In Nigeria, for example, patriarchal governance has long excluded women from decision-making, especially in the environmental spaces even though women "play an essential role in promoting sustainable development" as caretakers of community and land. One recent study notes that patriarchal structures in Nigeria "affect decision making in environmental matters, because the decision makers are male dominated". Informed by the author's background in public policy

and indigenous women's advocacy, this paper highlights those connections.

Using qualitative literary analysis, the study examines each play's narrative and characters to show how exploitation of people and nature is dramatized. Central questions include: How do Abubakar and Osofisan link social injustice and ecological ruin? In what ways do women and cultural traditions appear as remedies? Consistent with ecofeminist thought, the analysis finds that the resolution of these crises depends on communal solidarity and a revaluation of traditional practices—echoing the notion that “only by reversing current values, thereby privileging care and cooperation over more aggressive and dominating behaviors, can both society and environment benefit”.

II. ECOFEMINISM AND CONTEXTUAL LITERATURE REVIEW

This section outlines the ecofeminist concept and situates the plays within existing criticism.

Ecofeminist Theory: At its core, ecofeminism critiques patriarchal dualisms (man/woman, culture/nature) as the root of multiple oppressions. As Clark explains, ecofeminism is “perhaps the most sophisticated and intellectually developed branch of environmental criticism,” sensitive to how human self-conceptions shape treatment of nature. The movement's pioneers, such as Françoise d'Éaubonne, linked women's liberation with ecological health, arguing that in male-centered societies “the earth is treated with the same disregard as are women”*. Contemporary ecofeminists extend this to argue that “the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism”*. In practice, ecofeminism holds that social and environmental injustices must be addressed together. As the Women's Media Center summarizes, any solution “must take into account its impact on the other so that women's equality should not be achieved at the expense of the environment,

and vice versa”. This principle guides our reading of the two plays: the struggles of women, politics, and land are treated as interconnected.

Literary and Cultural Context: *Once Upon Four Robbers* (1980) and *A New Weft in the Loom* (2010) are contemporary Nigerian dramas that fuse traditional narrative forms with political satire. Critics note that Osofisan's *Four Robbers* draws on Yoruba oral storytelling to address themes of armed robbery and social justice. For example, one study of the play observes that “the sub-texts to *Four Robbers* are based on Yoruba culture and the Nigerian political situation. The dramatist uses the Yoruba storytelling tradition; he also responds to the contemporary social problem of armed robbery and the inability of the government to provide a credible solution”. Similarly, Abubakar's drama is known to dramatize Nigeria's ethnic divisions and leadership failures through allegory and myth (as multi-ethnic communities are drawn into conflict and resolution). Other scholarship highlights that Abubakar employs multiculturalism and satire to critique corruption, though none have yet applied an ecofeminist lens.

Taken together, these critical insights show that both plays engage local tradition while commenting on issues of governance and inequality. The present study extends this by examining how gender and ecology are woven into those issues. Drawing on ecofeminist scholarship and Nigerian social analysis, it reveals how the playwrights portray nature and women as key to healing societal rifts.

III. ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE PLAYS

This analysis highlights recurring motifs in each play that reflect ecofeminist themes: the consequences of patriarchy on nature and people, and the elevation of women and communal values as solutions.

A. *A New Weft in the Loom*: Abubakar's play opens with a mythic prologue of the land of the unborn, in which spiritual figures symbolize human traits

(Power, Affluence, Selflessness, etc.) as choices of destiny. This cosmology sets the stage: society's present chaos is shown as the result of earlier decisions. The drama then moves to a modern political campaign, where characters Dany (an uneducated party operative) and Dende (a disgruntled graduate) represent Nigeria's elite and masses. Abubakar satirizes both: Dany exemplifies blind loyalty and corruption, while Dende initially blames society for his poverty. The narrative criticizes how patriarchal elites exploit nature and people alike. For instance, the play explicitly shows an oil-rich southern region whose land and water are ruined by greedy leaders. One character, Osadebe, confronts this injustice: "you... are a leader of the vanguard that cries foul over the deteriorating ecological condition of the southern part..." (implying politicians have let the environment and people suffer). This reflects the ecofeminist insight that male-dominated power structures cause ecological harm, as both nature and common citizens are sacrificed for profit.

Women in *A New Weft in the Loom* are consistently portrayed as the moral and ecological caretakers of society. The Earth Priestess character narrates how "Mother Earth" once unified warring tribes with a sacred marriage rite, establishing communal peace. The Mother Earth figure herself is a nurturing deity who "saved the chaotic earth surface in the past," emphasizing that women (often in symbolic form) are agents of restoration. All-female dialogue reinforces this: for example, when community members discuss a burning homeland, one chides, "And who bears the burnt?"—reply: "We, women... the crying children, the bleating animals... name it." In other words, women bear the emotional and physical cost of crises, tending to households, animals, and lands in the fallout of male folly. This theme echoes scholarship noting that Nigerian women, as primary subsistence farmers and carers, are often "the most significant environmental degradation victims" due to their vulnerability and constant interface with nature. Abubakar's drama dramatizes that burden.

Yet the play also envisions women as saviors: the three maidens who win Mother Earth's contest eventually marry their suitors in a communal ceremony, symbolically uniting three ethnic regions. The Earth Priestess then hints that all victims are culpable ("The victims too, both the poor and the rich, are guilty..."), suggesting collective responsibility. Ultimately, *A New Weft* implies that reclaiming harmonious ties to nature and to each other—through values like selflessness and cultural solidarity—can heal the ruptures. This conclusion is inherently ecofeminist: it mirrors the idea that grassroots unity and respect for "Mother Nature" go hand in hand with social justice.

B. *Once Upon Four Robbers*: Osofisan's play uses a "magic boon" narrative (a well-known Yoruba folktale motif) to explore moral conflict. It opens in a marketplace where a notorious robber has just been executed. The surviving robbers quarrel until they are interrupted by Aafa, a man hired to impersonate a Muslim cleric. Aafa, using Ifá (a Yoruba earth-based religion), casts spells on each robber and instructs them not to target the poor or private homes—only to publicly and "fairly" steal from the wealthy. This structure poses a direct question: Should rebellion against injustice itself become unjust?

Politically, *Four Robbers* allegorizes Nigeria's military and criminal elements. Osofisan presents the soldiers who seized power and enriched themselves, and the robbers who claim to attack the rich, as mirror images of greed. In one sense, both the ruling junta and the robbers loot public resources—whether through stolen oil revenue or armed heists. Yet the play emphasizes the agency of ordinary people: an audience member is repeatedly asked to choose which side wins at the end, forcing a reflection on collective responsibility. As one critic notes, Osofisan indicts all parties: "The soldiers... and the victims of these circumstances... both cause havoc," and whichever side prevails, "the masses still suffer the most" (the original study's argument).

The ecofeminist reading highlights how *Four Robbers* juxtaposes conventional religion and indigenous spirituality. Aafa parodies a priest: he bears both Qur'anic prayer beads and secret knowledge of the Earth. He preaches morality at first, then pragmatically empowers the robbers. This exposes religious hypocrisy in a patriarchal society: clergy may condemn violence, yet bless it behind the scenes. Meanwhile, female characters embody survival. Alhaja, a market woman, explains that during the civil war she posed as a pilgrim but really traded and took bribes to survive. When Aafa confronts her, she defiantly replies, "I survived... and what do you think matters beyond that? I survived." Her pragmatic "impurity" of selling to both sides is justified by desperation. Through Alhaja's story and others, Osofisan shows that ordinary women and the poor adapt traditional roles (trading, negotiating, even theft) in service of family survival. However, the play makes clear this is not an ideal solution: female characters suffer the consequences of violence and instability.

Critically, *Four Robbers* suggests that any attempt to overcome injustice by turning fellow victims against each other only perpetuates chaos. In the final counsel of Aafa, he essentially tells the audience that freeing the robbers would spark bloodshed, yet executing them does not guarantee peace either. This dilemma embodies the ecofeminist insight that solutions must be holistic. As one commentator puts it, criminality only "destroys societal peace," and the true path to justice lies in collective action without scapegoating other victims. In ecofeminist terms, Osofisan is pointing out that you cannot clean society by adding more bloodshed or division.

Like Abubakar, Osofisan ends on an ambivalent note. The final image still emphasizes community values: despite tribal and religious differences, languages and storytelling traditions converge. The use of multiple native languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Edo) and the embrace of tribal myths suggest that acknowledging and integrating Nigeria's cultural

diversity is part of the solution. In the play's magical framework, wise women and communal symbols often guide outcomes (for instance, references to the Yoruba creation myth and the goddesses). This echoes ecofeminist respect for indigenous spirituality as a counterpoint to patriarchal modernity.

Together, the analyses show that both dramas affirm ecofeminist principles: the catastrophic effects of patriarchal greed on environment and people, and the hope that reclaiming communal, female-centered wisdom can repair the damage. These themes align with the ecofeminist claim that societal crises (economic collapse, violence, environmental ruin) must be understood in tandem. The author's policy-oriented perspective underscores this: addressing any one problem (e.g. poverty or environmental pollution) in isolation risks worsening another. As one authority reminds us, strategies "to fix both these wrongs means acknowledging that the two are intricately linked".

IV. CONCLUSION

This ecofeminist reading of *A New Weft in the Loom* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* reaffirms the original thesis' findings: social and ecological disintegration are shown as two sides of one crisis rooted in patriarchal injustice. Both Abubakar and Osofisan illustrate that corrupt, male-dominated leadership devastates not only human communities but the natural world they depend on. In each play, women emerge as the stewards of culture, nature, and morality—forced to "bear the burnt" of the ruling class's failures but also uniquely positioned to heal the rifts. These portrayals exemplify ecofeminist theory's core insight: "the domination of women by men is intimately linked to the destruction of the environment".

Moreover, the study highlights the positive message underlying the satire. Both dramas suggest that restoring traditional communal values—illustrated

by marriage rites, storytelling, and indigenous spirituality—can reknit societal bonds and reconcile humanity with the earth. This resonates with the ecofeminist call to revalue care and cooperation over domination. As noted by global authorities, only by “privileging care and cooperation over more aggressive and dominating behaviors” can “both society and environment benefit”. In the Nigerian context, as one legal analysis concludes, giving women equal voice in governance (thereby merging their ecological wisdom with decision-making) is key to solving complex crises.

In sum, *A New Weft in the Loom* and *Once Upon Four Robbers* dramatize that patriarchy’s discontents are not inevitable. By highlighting how women’s solidarity with nature can reverse the tide, the authors echo an ecofeminist vision that is both personal and political. The analysis retains its original qualitative insights and offers a policy-relevant interpretation: literature can not only reflect injustice but also model organic solidarity as the antidote, in line with the author’s perspective on indigenous women’s empowerment.

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- [4] L. Wolfe, “What Is Ecofeminism and Why Does It Matter?”, *Women’s Media Center*, Apr. 2023. (“Bringing together feminism and environmentalism, ecofeminism argues that the domination of women and the degradation of the environment are consequences of patriarchy and capitalism”; and noting strategies must address both issues simultaneously.)
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Critical Analysis of the Nigerian Legal Framework,” *Beijing Law Review*, vol. 16, no. 1, Mar. 2025, pp. 398–411. (Highlights that patriarchal Nigerian law has historically marginalized women from environmental governance, even as women are “the most significant environmental degradation victims”.)