

**Social Stratification in Niyi Osundare's *The Man Who Walked Away and The Wedding Car***

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**Abstract**

No society is completely classless; for, as an adage says, “all fingers are not equal.” However, in spite of the inequality of persons, many societies have managed to keep the gap between the haves and the have-nots from becoming too wide. In *The Man Who Walked Away* and *the Wedding Car*, the society dramatised has not been able to keep the gap between the classes within manageable proportion. Using the Marxist theory, this paper investigates the nature of social stratification in these plays. It finds that injustice, poverty and depression are triggered by this unbridled stratification. The paper concludes that unless these issues are redressed very fast, everyone is in grave danger because neither persons nor property will be safe.

**Keywords:** *Stratification, Marxism, Injustice, Poverty, Depression*

**I. Introduction:**

Social stratification is a system used in grouping people in a society. People are grouped based on their income, wealth, age and sex. *The Man Who Walked Away* and *The Wedding Car* mirror a society that is divided along social class and wealth status. In the two plays, there are series of social stratification. Socio-political stratification largely refers to the division of society into two; mainly the few who wield or control governmental power and those who are governed. The upper class members who control political power are depicted as greedy and power conscious. Then, there is also economic stratification. Those who wish to control political power must first get economic power. As J. I. Tunde-Adeleke (2011) rightly observes, for many politicians, the aim of joining a political party “is to become rich and powerful” (p.127). To become rich and powerful means that a person must be willing to subjugate and oppress others. This is the narrative in most African societies.

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In analyzing its data, this study adopts Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' Marxist criticism. Marxist criticism is a set of ideology and principles which expose unjust socio-political and economic mechanisms which those in the oppressive class use to exploit and subjugate another class, mainly the weak and helpless. Marx and Engels put forward Marxism at the height of capitalism, that is, an economic system that exposes the working class to exploitation. Marxism suggests ideas that can crush the excesses of capitalists. According to Ann B. Dobie (2002),

These ideas were expounded in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), in which they identified class struggle as the driving force behind history and anticipated that it would lead to revolution in which the workers would overturn the capitalists, take control of economic production, and abolish private property by turning it over to the government to distribute fairly. With these events, class distinction would disappear. (p. 80)

Marx and Engels' radical philosophy aims to overthrow those who lord it over others. In other words, Marxism stands against oppression and exploitation which have promoted inequality and sustained the class struggles between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and proletariat (labourers). To quote Dobie again,

Marx saw history as progressive and inevitable. Private ownership, he said, began with slavery, then evolved into feudalism, which was largely replaced by capitalism by the late eighteenth century. Evident in small ways as early as the sixteenth century, capitalism became a fully developed system with the growing power of the bourgeoisie in the mid-nineteenth century. At every stage it had negative consequences because it was a flawed system that involved maintaining the power of a few by the regression of many. The result was ongoing class struggle. (p. 83)

Selfish individuals who control state power promote policies that give socio-economic advantages to few individuals. The less privileged, mainly, labourers, suffer from all oppressive policies that enrich the few privileged ones. This is the reason many people fight against capitalism. Marxism seeks a revolution that aims to restructure society bedeviled by capitalists' exploitation. Marx and Engels see capitalism as an evil that must be crushed. Charles E. Bressler (2003) maintains that:

The capitalists, or the bourgeoisie, have successfully enslaved the working class, or the proletariat, through economic policies and production of goods. The proletariat must now revolt and strip the bourgeoisie of their

economic and political power and place ownership of all property in the hands of the government who will then fairly distribute the people's wealth. (p. 163-164)

What differentiates members of the upper class from those of the middle or lower class is the amount of political and economic power each group has at its disposal. Those with political power and endless wealth use their means to re-structure society to suit their selfish interests. Marxists believe this must change. Abrams & Harpham (2012) comment that "changes in the fundamental mode of material production effect changes in class structure of a society, establishing in each era dominant and subordinate class that engage in a struggle for economic, political and social advantage". (p. 181) Their submission is that every reasonable society should re-organise its system of production in a way that every member of such society will enjoy good life without the fear of being intimidated by those who have money and power. Unless this is done, conflict must be expected along different social classes. Marxism sees conflicts of interests in every society, therefore, it proposes a radical confrontation to tackle those who promote these conflicts for their own gains. Agho (2015) affirms this line of reasoning when he says that:

Radical thinkers and philosophers of the Marxist persuasion outline in their discourses the tension created by the squabbles attendant on the interaction between members of the bourgeois and proletariat classes in every society. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels placed the redemption of the proletariats in the hands of the petite bourgeoisie or the lower or middle class: a class that was envisaged by the radical thinkers to mobilize or conscientize the masses through the dictatorship of the proletariat class to fight and sequester power from the bourgeois class and assume eventual control of the reins of government and control of the economy after the socialist revolution. (p.116)

No society will experience true change unless responsible men and women go into politics to change its negative narratives. McGlinchey et al (2017) strongly advise that "workers from factories across the world – the proles – were to organise themselves into politically and revolutionary movement to counter the exploitative and unequal effects of capitalism, which were accelerated and expanded by the industrial revolution." (p.42) Once the proletariats who form a good proportion of voters go into politics, they will be able to decide fair policies that will set their society free from undue exploitation.

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In his comment on Marxism, Carlos says that Marx and Engels' utmost goal is to create changes that will shelter the interest of the working class. He opines that "such changes would include the overthrow of the dominant capitalist ideology and the loss of power by those with money and privilege" (2000, pp.2088-2089). Once capitalist ideology is checked, the down trodden (working class) will enjoy a better life that will ensure their happiness. Solomon (1973) argues that "Marxism is the symbolism of dialectical conflict, of drama, of the unity of opposites, of revolutionary change, of matter and man in motion, constantly transcending the moment, pointing into the future". (p.17) The future here refers to a time when everyone will be equal in the eye of the law and societal economic order. Conscientisation of the poor masses is, therefore, important in the quest for emancipation. Amuta (1989) says that:

Marxism arose when and where it did as a result of determinate conditions primary among which was the ascendancy of capitalism, the alienation of labour, and the galvanization of working – class consciousness. Consequently, as a system of ideas, it was bound to reflect, even its avowed "scientific" aspirations, the major weaknesses (including racial arrogance) in the world view of the period. What is crucial in Marxism, therefore, is not the nationality of Marx and Engels but the practical content of their ideas especially in terms of positing in hypothetical form, an antithesis to the capitalist alienation of labour. (pp.59-60)

According to Amuta, again, the masses must first understand the cause and promoters of their plight. This will help them think critically in order to fashion out a profitable way of fighting for their proper place in society. They must also understand the way the capitalists economic and socio-political power work. On this, Carlos further notes that, "Marxism criticism is concerned both with understanding the role of politics, money, and power in literary works, and with redefining and reforming the way society distributes its resources among the classes. Fundamentally, the Marxist ideology projects a vision of a world not so much where class conflict has been minimized but one in which classes have disappeared altogether" (2000, p.2089).

Africa has become the hub of oppression and exploitation due to bad governance. This has been dramatised in many plays. It is not, however, enough to portray socio-political or economic plights of the masses in dramatic forms. It is fundamental to conscientise the

masses. This is the goal of playwrights like Femi Osofisan, Wole Soyinka, Bode Sowande and Ahmed Yerima. Niyi Osundare has joined these emancipation-driven playwrights who engage their plays in the fight against socio-political and economic maladies.

Osundare's *The Man Who Walked Away* and *The Wedding Car* express a strong Marxist spirit which aims to reform society for the good of all. These plays satirise individuals who use power entrusted with them to oppress and exploit the poor in society. The plays are written with a view to helping the poor 'wise up.' Consequently, the message of the playwright is that the poor must not give up. They must fight until justice and equity are achieved.

On Osundare's *The Wedding Car*, Raji (2003) notes the waste of resources on flamboyant wedding ceremonies which is a common phenomenon in most communities. Africans, particularly Nigerians, spend so much on wedding ceremonies. Raji (531) writes against this social malady. According to him:

A society wedding stands as the core action in *The wedding car*. A typical wedding programme in contemporary Nigeria itself represents a veritable study in postcolonial culture. The wedding price, the attire donned by the participants, the manner of entertainment presented as well as the rituals of wedding are all fusions of traditional heritage and "modern" practice. But perhaps more important for the playwright here is the characteristic ostentatiousness and superficiality associated with the programme. (2000, p.531)

Over the years, we have witnessed occasions where people put huge amount of money into social functions. This is sometimes done to show off or attract donations from friends and family members. Worse than organising an ostentatious wedding ceremony is the fact that some people marry not for love but for the love of money. According to Raji:

Deremi epitomizes this in the play. His desperation to break the cycle of poverty explains why he has to cross over to seek a wife from the Chamberlains'. Osundare insists however that to so compromise is to lose one's cherished freedom; it is to embark on a course of self-destruction. Lasun is that character in the play who takes Deremi on a journey down memory lane. "What happened to the dreams we had?" "He asked Deremi ... I could remember we looked all around our society and what we saw were the monsters of greed and graft, of inefficiency, of lack of consideration for others, of the deification of money and property. We decided to be different. (2000, p.531)

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Unfortunately for Deremi, he cannot withstand the pressure of poverty. So, he deviates from his dream of changing his society for the good of all. Osundare, through this play, satirises all youths who abandon their good dreams on the altar of immediate satisfaction.

Abuse of power is a notable theme in *The Wedding Car*. It is also the focus of Bode Sowande's *Flamingo*. According to Okwechime & Eke (2007), "What Sowande also presents in the play is the use of political position for personal enrichment. The dramatist does not show this directly, but the fraudulent activities are brought out through the interrogation of Mowambe" (p.62). Sowande uses the play to satirize the dubious act of those entrusted with public offices. Raji notes that "... the man is at one with Osundare in expressing outrage and indignation against the people who "live in an ocean of wealth." (p.531). Chief Chamberlain, as the embodiment of this duplicity and vanity, is the consistent target of derision and wit. His ultimate disgrace is not just as a consequence of smuggling a car into the country but the culmination of his innumerable crimes committed against the dispossessed of the earth."

*The Man who Walked Away*, Raji explains, "is a fictive anticipation of the event of the late eighties with the simple difference being that Deji, the central character in the play does not have the benefits of the insight that "retrenched" has to offer" (p.532). Deji is retrenched from work and this makes him descend into the trench of depression. Raji holds the opinion that suicide should not be seen as a solution to social or economic problems. The need to reach his audience easily makes Osundare to use an accessible language in his artistic craft. Adagboyin (2001) comments on this thus:

Apart from being a trained stylistician, Osundare who belongs to the school of poetic accessibility, considers the need to communicate as the primary aim of language use. So also does the desire to establish contact with the addressees represent an essential concern. The reason for this is obvious: language use, whatever arguments may be proposed, is never an end in itself but a means to an end. Thus, the level of relationship maintained between the addresser and the addressee will determine how effective communication has been established. (p.17)

Adagboyin's observation is apt because a close study of Osundare's plays demonstrates his simplicity of language. His choice of words makes his message very clear to his audience. Adagboyin further notes that "Osundare exploits demonstrative references

(which constitute an important feature of his Nominal Group (NGP) use), vocatives, personal address, and imperatives.” (p.17) This is well represented in the dialogue between his characters. Being a language expert, Osundare makes his language highly accessible. Worthy of note is Osundare’s use of humour in *The Wedding Car*. He uses humour as a satirical weapon to expose the arrogance of Chief Chamberlain, a corrupt official who is later arrested for smuggling a car into his society. Uhunmwangho (2001) explains that, “Osundare mixes high, historical romance with low earthly humour which coincides with “universe time” that denotes an infinite stretch of time which an event can be situated.” (p.48) Osundare uses English language in such a way that African local linguistic beauty is not lost at all. To this end, Ogoanah & Chikogu (2011, p.18) explain that “... Osundare has demonstrated that we can domesticate Standard English with such a flexibility that is at once appropriate for our socio-cultural development and literary expression, without inhibiting international intelligibility.” (p.38) Osundare’s language as used in the *Wedding Car* and the *Man who Walked Away* is full of life and its accessibility adds dramatic beauty to the plays.

Class consciousness, class stratification and social inequality form the core of *The Wedding Car* and *The Man Who Walked Away*. These equate the two plays with Olu Obafemi’s *Dark Times are Over?* According to Okwechime & Efosa Legamah (2021):

the need to redefine class and its stratification is dramatized in *Dark Times are Over?* Class in relation to the society is the division of a people into particular group according to their financial, intellectual, social or religious status. This grouping is usually unwritten in any societal law or code. It can be better referred to as a social construction which is as old as man himself. Though class and its stratification is unwritten in any formal law but the daily happenings in the society underscore its presence and its inevitability in the activities of mankind. (p.85)

The division of society along social class is largely responsible for the lawlessness in society. Those who feel exploited and alienated abandon their noble course to pursue irresponsible goals. Okwechime & Legamah’s comment is similar to that of Amuta who examines the negative effects of capitalism in Ngugi-wa Thiongo’s *I will Marry When I Want* and argues that “the overriding preoccupations of the play, then, is the nature of capitalist exploitation and its implications for every facet of life among members of different classes in society. Thus, the “love” affair between Kiguunda’s daughter and

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Koi's son is depicted as one based on inequality" (p.163). In the same vein, the love affair between Deremi and Chief Chamberlains' daughter in *The Wedding Car* is based on social inequality which Deremi plans to bridge. The inequality caused by capitalism is promoted by government officials like Chief Chamberlain who uses his influence to achieve his inordinate ambition.

Class stratification is often the cause of social inequality which engenders violence whenever it is no longer bearable. In Osundare's *The State Visit*, the masses kick against suppression and oppression which hinder their happiness. The height of bad governance depicted in *The State Visit*, Olorunyomi (2003) opines, galvanises "students and other social groups join the crowd. The police attempt a dispersal but the population, in high spirit and determination, will not bulge" (p.542). This is the kind of Marxist spirit Lasun possesses in *The Wedding Car*. He is fearless. He questions the moral degeneration of Deremi who chooses to marry the Chamberlain's daughter rather than fight to birth a better society for all. In this essay, therefore, we show that Osundare's *The Man Who Walked Away* and *The Wedding Car* indict social stratification as the cause of injustice, poverty and depression in the society.

## II. Social Stratification and Injustice

Social stratification breeds conflict and this conflict in turn causes certain societal problems that mostly affect the poor who occupy the bottom rungs of societal ladder. *The Wedding* and *The Man Who Walked Away* indict social stratification as the cause of injustice.

Idowu & Olajoke (2013) argue that, "in Nigeria, there are glaring social vices, social decadence prevailing in nearly all the facets of the economy" (p.13). The above assertion is valid because *The Wedding Car* and the *Man Who Walked Away* clearly identify some levels of social decadence that have held the poor hostage. Injustice is still a big problem in Nigeria because some selfish individuals deploy it to maintain their place in society. The economically disadvantaged are largely at the mercy of the powerful who lord it over them. What belongs to the needy, for instance, is often given to the rich who can afford whatever they need. An instance of this is revealed in *The Wedding Car*.

Madam Ogunpade: But this rice was imported from America to feed the people.  
Chief Chamberlain: Am I not the people . . . eh . . . eh . . . one of the people?  
Alagba Ogunpade: No, the poor people  
Chief Chamberlain: Oh that again, I thought you people were too old to be socialists!  
Madam Ogunpade: But the truth is that those who need their rice never get it  
Chief Chamberlain: Truth is bitter and when truth is mixed with rice, it is difficult to swallow (*Pause.*) You see, let those poor people you talk about eat what they get. Our country has not reached that stage where everyone can have enough. (2005, p.47)

Chief Chamberlain is so rich that he buys a new car for his daughter's wedding, yet he covets rice meant for the poor. The rice that is provided for the poor is hijacked by those who control political power. The likes of Chief Chamberlain and his cohorts hoard what belongs to the less privilege. Rice as used here symbolizes whatever is essential to enable the vulnerable survive. It demonstrates how the rich sit on the lots of the weak and poor. Politicians in many African countries still attach much importance to material gains in political arena. According to Idowu & Olajoke:

political speaking, politics has not been practiced the way it should be within our society. It is widely believed that politics should be practiced in a way that dividends of democracy could be brought nearer to the people particularly those at the grassroots. The reverse is the case in Nigerian context where politics is played by politicians to enrich their individual purses. (2013, p.14)

Truly, politics is still at its lowest point in Nigeria as dramatised in the plays under study. All the poor get from those they elect into political offices is injustice. Marxist critics often condemn a system of government which places power in the hand of the selected few. Chief Chamberlain dismisses any socialist sympathy for the poor. It is people like him that Marxism therefore tackles so that the poor can enjoy a better life.

Even in higher institutions where "future leaders" are groomed, injustice is also prevalent. It is heartbreaking that students who should protect one another's interest oppress the weak among them. This is revealed thus:

Tunji: Long time, e e h? Oh those were fantastic days at Jakuta University. Remember 'The Bug', 'The Scorpion', 'The Bleach', etc, etc.

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Lasun: Yes those magazines you guys were fond of using to witch hunt women ... especially those of you who never quite succeeded with them.

Tunji: Remember what happened when one of them took Obi's girlfriend. (p.66)

Student magazines are tools that are used to inform and reform students on campus. This emancipatory tool is hijacked by some selfish students to "witch-hunt", perpetuate injustice and oppress the weak. Worse of all, Tunji recalls how someone snatches "Obi's girlfriend". This is an act that is capable of leading to bloodshed. It is however those with privileged positions who enjoy doing this because they usually go away with it. They are mainly from the upper class so they find it easier to take what belongs to people from the lower ladder. This is anti-Marxism. Marxism believes that everybody is equal, therefore, no one should be oppressed. The fact that Osundare situates this type of injustice in an academic environment shows that all is not well in our ivory towers.

Student Union Government (SUG) on campus is set up to groom future leaders but the reverse is the case in most higher institutions today. Student representatives collect dues and seek for funds from the rich in society but whatever they get is embezzled. Lasun recalled such an instance:

Lasun: And that Beast of No Nation who embezzled student union funds...

Tunji: But later told the auditors that he lost one thousand pounds while prostrating for an uncle at Heathrow Airport during a student conference in London. (p.67)

It is amazing how someone loses "one thousand pounds" while prostrating. To quote Idowu and Olajoke again, "the moral debasement in our society cannot be overemphasized because moral virtues had been thrown into the wind due to the various negative acts and deeds of majority of the population within the society" (p.12). The student who embezzles funds meant for his fellow students and comrades is actually morally bankrupt. This is the height of deceit and exploitation which Marxist ideology condemns. Fairness demands that all people, irrespective of their class, should enjoy the commonwealth. Unfortunately, a few privileged ones have hijacked what belongs to all.

Economic injustice is portrayed in *The Man Who Walked Away*. Economically speaking, there is nothing wrong with a dying company downsizing its work force. What is wrong is the fact that most companies retrench people and abandon them. Some benefits ought to go with retrenchment. In *The Man Who Walked Away*, Abeke is shocked that her husband is laid off without any consideration for his immediate or post-retrenchment life. This is captured in this dialogue:

Abeke:                   What . . . what do you mean?  
Deyi:                    I am fired?  
Abeke:                   No . . . No. How can? Didn't you tell them we have kids to support,  
                              rent to pay, medicine to . . .  
Deyi:                    Abeke, our manager is as automatic and impersonal as the  
                              machines we operate. He said he had orders from the company's  
                              headquarters in London to fire us . . . or retrench' as he put it. They  
                              say our products are not doing well on the market so they have to  
                              cut production down and cut us out.  
Abeke:                   And you were just sent home like that? (p.4)

Abeke's last remark underlines the unjust act in the capitalist company's decision. The manager's attitude is worse than the company's decision to retrench workers. Ideally, the manager ought to plead for the retrenched workers so that they will be given a soft-landing spot. Granted, retrenchment is an economic policy which any company can employ to save its business. It should not, however, be carried out without due consideration. There is a greater sense of injustice in the shabby way Deyi is retrenched. According to his lamentation, "a hundred and fifty of us, without notice, without sympathy: just told like school boys about to start a holiday: 'eh . . . don't come tomorrow'" (p.5). This is injustice whichever way it is seen. In a bid to expand income and profits, capitalists hire and fire at will and sometimes, they underpay their workers to disable them economically. Marxism frowns at this because it denies workers the right to enjoy a good life. According to Agho (2015), "radical thinkers and philosophers of the Marxist persuasion outline in their discourses the tension created by the squabbles attendant on the interaction between members of the bourgeois and proletariat classes in every society". (p.118) Indeed, there is serious tension created in the unjust relation between the bourgeois and the proletariat who engage in material production mostly in a capitalist economy. The unbalanced

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relationship between the capitalists and their workers often results in unfair treatment of labourers.

### III. Social Stratification and Poverty

Poverty is one of the major effects of social stratification which is well captured in *The Man Who Walked Away*. Life will certainly be difficult for the poor when the wealth of society rests with the rich who give pittance to the poor and pay workers slave wages. Kornblum (1997) argues that:

One of the chief causes of poverty is that people who are working full-time are not being paid wages that give them enough income to raise them above the poverty line. In a study of the working poor, David Ellwood found that among two-parent families who were poor, 44 percent had at least one member who was working full-time. Low wages, Ellwood states, are a major cause of poverty. (p.359)

The above scenario painted by Kornblum is correct and is well illustrated in the plays under study. Deyi works full-time in his company and until he is retrenched, his wage did not take him above poverty level. Marxist critics see poor income structure as a wicked act or unjust economic treatment given to labourers so as to keep them far from the social class of their employers. Once this happens, the capitalists will achieve the kind of class structure they want, that is, the upper and the lower class. This kind of relationship will disempower the poor so that they will find it difficult to cater for their daily needs, thereby leaving them at the mercy of their selfish employers.

Poverty makes children of the poor to reason awkwardly. It affects their mentality such that they consider what is wrong to be right. This is the case of Abeke and Deyi's daughter in the *The Man Who Walked Away*. The extract below reveals the effect of poverty on the poor:

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| Toyin: | I scored an "A", Mama, and our teacher said it was the best in our class.  |
| Abeke: | Un un un Toyin, your score in Social Studies is not so good this time. Why?  |
| Toyin: | The teacher asked how many people should sleep in one room and I answered nine: three on the bed, three under the bed, and three on the remaining part of the floor. |
| Abeke: | Then what did your teacher say?  |

Toyin: He said I was wrong, and my classmates laughed at me. (p.3)

Obviously, Toyin is a brilliant student in that she gets the best grade in a particular subject which is considered to be 'difficult.' Sadly, she fails Social Studies woefully because she does not know that it is unhealthy for nine people to share a small room. Poverty conditions her to see a tiny room as big enough to house a family of nine. This is unlike the Chamberlains in *The Wedding Car*. They are less than nine but they occupy a mansion whose door is described thus:

Host Woman: (As the parties reach the door) O'tooo! (Halt!). Here is the door to Chamberlain's house. It is made of gold, the hinges are of purest silver. When it opens, it is only to let in money. This is the door no poor or wretched dare touch. (p.50)

The Chamberlains describe the above door to their future in-laws who come to ask their daughter's hand in marriage. The door leading into the sitting room of the Chamberlains is made of gold and silver while that of Deyi and Abeke is described thus, "... *The right entrance is covered with a faded, over-used door curtain; the left is simply left open*" (p.1).

The economic disparity between Deyi and the Chamberlains is of great concern to Marxist critics. It is pathetic that the two families do not enjoy equal distribution of wealth in the same society. The Chamberlains have used their influence to acquire stupendous wealth which affords them luxury while the children of Deyi squeeze themselves in a single room. Osundare as a Marxist playwright reveals that the unjust economic stratification exposes the poor to poverty and low life. In Obafemi's *Dark Times are Over?* (2005), Okwechime & Legemah (2021) explain that "Obafemi brings into question the illicit and anti-social means of wealth acquisition that saw the rich to the top of the ladder they now occupy and how they perpetually oppress the poor" (p.85). The source the wealth of the Chamberlains is also questionable. It is this kind of situation Osundare strives to end with his plays; a situation where a class of people corners the commonwealth to lord it over the less privileged.

Hunger follows poverty. Food is one of the basic needs of man after shelter. Once poverty occasions hunger, then all is not well. Inequality in society makes one class to be well fed and another to be very hungry. In *The Wedding Car*, Chief Chamberlain attends a

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ceremony where champagne is used to wash hands, yet, Deyi cannot give his children a square meal. The challenge of hunger in Deyi's home is captured thus:

Sola: I am hungry Mama  
 Abeke: Alright, go and play. When I finish my talk with Mama Agba I will cook and then you can eat. *Pele Akanni, go and play (Exit Sola)*  
 Iya Agba: Yes now I see what Deyi has: hungry children and a wife who worships a thirty-year old sewing machine. (p.18)

Hunger makes people vulnerable to dangers such as diseases or molestation. Children whose parents cannot fend for may die of hunger or play into the hands of sexual devourers. A close study of Deyi's home reveals that his wife is almost in charge and this can induce poverty says Kornblum. According to him:

Another reason for increase in poverty is the increase in the number of single parent, female-headed families. The break-up of marriages or long – term relationships leaves women alone with the responsibility for raising small children and earning the income to do so. Such families often become poor because it is more difficult for a woman to support a family alone than it is for a man. (p.360)

What Kornblum describes is the true reflection of Deyi's home. His wife has “a thirty-year old sewing machine” (p. 18) with which she uses to earn a living for her hungry children and jobless husband. This will definitely expose her family to social problems which the rich do not face.

Among the Chamberlains' servants, the distress of poverty is also reported. They work but their low wages hardly support them. This is revealed thus:

Lazarus: Honestly, this servant work is the worst in the world.  
 Jemina: I know. You are the last to sleep.  
 Lazarus: And the first to wake up  
 Jemina: You work business breakfast  
 Lazarus: And contract luncheons  
 Jemina: You prepare christening feasts.  
 Lazarus: And birthday feasts.  
 Jemina: House-warming parties  
 Lazarus: And funeral feasts.  
 Jemina: And if, by chance, master doesn't have any ceremony on weekend, he lends you out to his friends who do.  
 Lazarus: You cook the food

Jemina: But you eat the left-over. (p.35)

This is crude slavery because Jemina and Lazarus work for the wealthy in society, but sadly, they eat only the left over.

Exploitation is the hall mark of the relationship between the poor and the rich. The welfare of the poor ought to be the concern of the rich because they depend their services. It is sad that the poor are being neglected because they are considered to be insignificant. However, the rich are warned to beware of the hungry and angry:

Alagba Ogunpade: Indeed! If we don't have enough food to go round now, we may have enough trouble to go round later. A country in which a few feed while the majority merely watches is in a state of undeclared war. (p.47)

Poverty has the potential to cause revolution. Hungry people are dangerous, for once they set their minds on destruction of their oppressor, nothing will stop them. Alagba Ogunpade knows this and that is why he advises his friend to beware of the hungry. A society where some have enough to eat and even throw away but some do not have at all can only be a society sitting on a keg of gunpowder.

#### IV. Social Stratification and Depression

Social stratification brings about depression in the long run. This is so because social factors largely influence people's minds, thinking and mental health. Deyi finds himself in a society where inequality presides over everything around him. So, he finds it difficult to cope with his economic handicap. Its attending effect is noticed and his dependable wife counsels him thus:

Abeke: Deyi, you must eat now, or you will just starve. Remember for the past few days, you have always, scratched the top of your food . . .

Deyi: *Maa binu Abeke (forgive me Abeke)* It's because I have no appetite.

Abeke: What happened to your appetite?

Deyi: I lost it .

Abeke: Then you must find it. If your company wants to kill you, will you help them by killing yourself? When life's drum sounds *Pami! Pami! Pami! (kill me, kill me kill me)* should we not advise a softer way of dancing it?

Deyi: Yes, if you have control over your own legs. Since I lost my job, I have become the grass of the wind-valley, bent head-to-ground in whatever direction the wind blows.

Abeke: Why do you talk as if the end of the world has come. Come on Deyi. (p.7)

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Economic pressure throws Deyi off balance and this devastates him greatly. Osundare uses his play, *The Man Who Walked Away* to blame poor economic policy as the cause of distress and depression in developing nations. Deyi loses his job in an unjust society and he is mocked when he tries to get another one. His friends and mother-in-law do not help him so he drowns in his negative thought.

Depression becomes a huge challenge when it is poorly managed. Deyi is a victim of poor depression management. He does not get the right help he needs from people outside his immediate family and this generates a mental health issue which makes him lose faith in himself and life. Deyi becomes an existentialist who sees life as meaningless and a hostile place to dwell in consequently he does the worse. Unknown to Deyi's wife, Abeke, the end of the world has, literally, come to her husband. Despite all her encouragement, Deyi could not cope with his economic impotence. He slides into depression and ends his life. This is revealed in a news broadcast:

The body of a light-skinned man has just been found hanging from an *isin* tree at Mile Twenty near the Oribo Bridge. The man is described as middle-aged and has fairly large scar on his arm. The identification found on him shows him as a former worker of Pantibury Overseas Limited. (p.29)

The suicide of Deyi demonstrates how social stratification brings untold disasters to those in the lower group. In a society where the welfare of the down trodden is not the concern of the rich, especially those in power, disaster is inevitable. Depression also arises when a worker is underpaid or works under an oppressive condition. This is the ugly situation that Chief Chamberlain's workers find themselves. At the height of their distress, Lazarus expresses his frustration thus:

Jemina: The price of everything has gone up: *garri* is untouchable, only rich people and senators now eat rice. Yet whenever you ask for more pay, what you get is threat, threat, threat . . .

Lazarus: I am tired of this job, I don't know where else to go. (p.36).

That Lazarus is "tired" means he has reached a stage where he cannot bear his burden again. He has been under the servitude of Chief Chamberlain who ignores his plights. Ideally, his salary should be reviewed as prices of foods surge high in market but his exploitative boss only threatens to sack him. Lazarus is "tired" and quitting his job is not

an option because he does not “know where else to go” (p.36). With this kind of mind-crushing situation, depression is inevitable. In his attempt to save the likes of Lazarus and Jemina, Osundare dramatises the evil of unbridled social stratification. This is not to rescue the poor from the claws of the rich alone but to draw attention to the plights of the poor which can trigger a revolution.

## **V. Conclusion**

Societies across the world have salient or pronounced cases of social stratification which manifests in different ways and affect people differently. Social stratification permits society to be structured and divided along socio-political and economic lines. Osundare’s *The Man Who Walked Away* and *The Wedding Car* dramatise the effects of social division on those who occupy the bottom position in the society.

The privileged who occupy political offices in society introduce economic policies which often favour the rich described as the bourgeoisie by Marx. This class of people lord it over those in the lower class. For example, Chief Chamberlain and his circle of political friends ranging from president, vice president, Chief of Army, senators and other top government functionaries throw lavish parties from public funds at their disposal. The Chamberlains have servants Lazarus and Jemina who cook for the rich yet they eat left over food. They are underpaid and they are often threatened whenever they complain about their miserable salaries. Worse than their case is that of Deyi who is fired by his boss and sent away without post retrenchment benefits. Economically, social stratification breeds exploitation. Apart from unemployment, underemployment and economic disparity that weigh down the down trodden, the rich frustrate any poor man who tries to break into their circle through marriage. In his effort to end his economic woes, Deremi seeks to marry the daughter of Chief Chamberlain. He is driven into debt because he has to take a loan from the bank to finance his wedding. Social stratification has negative effects on the weak and poor in society. Poverty, injustice and depression are major effects of social division outlined in Osundare’s *The Wedding Car* and *The Man Who Walked Away*. As a Marxist playwright, Osundare satirises society that celebrates social stratification. He lays bare the inequality between the rich and the poor and how it is sustained. Osundare stands with the poor, therefore, he gives them hope that one day they will triumph. He expresses this hope through the arrest of Chief Chamberlain on the day

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of his daughter's wedding. He is arrested for importing an exotic car into the country without paying import duties. This case which nails him down serves as poetic justice. In conclusion, the plays warn that, unless concrete steps are taken to redress the imbalance created by social stratification, everyone, both the haves and the have-nots are in grave danger. For, in the words of Frederick Douglass (1886), "where justice is denied, where poverty is enforced ... and where any one class is made to feel that society is in an organised conspiracy to oppress, rob and degrade them, neither persons nor property will be safe" (p.228).

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