

**Towards Peace Making and Conflict Resolution: An Exploration of the Role of Youth in  
Olu Obafemi's *Wheels***

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**Abstract**

Over the years, literature remains a vibrant communicative means through which literary activists explore their divergent views on societal issues ranging from poor leadership and abysmal corruption, class struggle, excessive drug and substance abuse and the general insecurity, among other social and moral vices that retard national progress. This paper critically examines the pivotal role and purposeful contributions of youth, such as Kofo, Kemi, Seun and Gbenga in Olu Obafemi's *Wheels*. These young men employ mediation and conciliatory approach in resolving persistent conflicts as a result of injustice which turn their society apart as vividly portrayed in the novel. The findings of the paper reveal that youth who acquire proper and sound education are jewel and invaluable assets for societal development in all ramifications – socially, morally, politically and economically.

## Introduction

The novel, as a genre of literature, has served and still serves as an instrumental tool of social criticism. Prominent African novelists, such as Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthill of the Savannah* (1987), Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968), *Fragments* (1970) and *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) as well as the contemporary writers, such as Abubakar Adam Ibrahim in *Season of Crimson Blossoms* (2015) and Aliyu Kamal in *The Upper Level* (2021), to mention a few, have employed the novel as a potent weapon in fighting corruption and bad leadership that retard national progress. Like historians, literary writers also record the happenings of their societies via their creative works. They write to explain the social dilemmas of their societies and also portray a way of life, which has affected them. Corroborating this view, Idegwu (2021) opines that:

Writers, all over the world, through their creative works, x-ray the ills, the craze for materialism, the iniquitous acts and other forms of ignoble behaviours that bedevil the world. Writers like Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri and Adimora-Ezeigbo, among others, daily employ literature as an indispensable tool in their attempts to sanitise their society, thereby creating an ideal world (85).

This and similar other views pinpoint the paramount roles writers play in every society. In other words, the creative writer is a mediator between the society and its people. Thus, being a sensitive needle, the writer, as Wa Thiong'o (1972) explains "registers, with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflicts and tensions in his changing society" (47). Hence, many African novelists, particularly Nigerians, as mentioned above, focus on social issues with special emphasis on leadership deficiency in Nigeria. Differently put, they largely blame the irresponsible leaders of Nigeria for the terrible state of the nation.

Commenting on the role of the novel as a means of addressing social menaces in Africa, Keston (2018) succinctly buttresses that:

Contemporary African fiction beams its searchlight on the political elite especially, what they have done with governance. Among those who are also affected by the misrule of the elites are the youths. The youths are fundamental to the growth of any society, yet they are often overlooked in the stream of things (39).

From Keston's comment, it is obvious that youth have a vital role to play in national development, but unfortunately they are not given due concern, recognition and consideration in our contemporary society. Instead, politicians use and misuse them to achieve their selfish and insatiable desires. They have turned them into gangsters like Reza and other youth at San Siro – a sanctum of criminals, who are exploited by Senator Maikudi in Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossom* (2015).

### **On the Role of Youth**

The role of youth in any society is profound. They are the backbone of societal progress. Essentially, the myriad contributions they give towards socio-political and economic development in virtually every society are enormous and magnificent. Idike and Innocent (2015) expressly reveal that:

The wheel of development of any country lies on the shoulder of how productive and creative the youthful populations are. The youth in any society are the engine of growth and development; because, they provide the labour force for production of goods and service to take effect... The role of youth on national development is sacrosanct to the whole developmental aspiration of any society. The youth are the corner-stone to societal rejuvenation. Societies are not only recreated through youthful

population, but, youth are often referred to as leaders of tomorrow (50).

However, the untoward behaviour of youth in contemporary Hausa Muslim society of Northern Nigerian region and other parts of the country compel critics like Naniya (2021) to lament that, “The situation of the youth today is as pathetic as it tilts towards moral decadence and the establishment of a permissive society devoid of any code of conduct” (5). Further lamenting on the nonchalant attitude of the stakeholders concerning the educational and welfare services of the youth, this critic grunts:

Where the Youth are let loose to linger in limbo devoid of proper values inculcated into their social and moral conduct and the leadership is indifferent to this pathetic situation due to incessant individualism, materialism and lust for power, the youth will certainly degenerate into low social thinking with all its attendant negative consequences. Where this happens, as is being witnessed today, one is in a dilemma to forecast a definite role of the youth in future (8).

Similar to Naniya’s view, is Ibrahim and Ringim’s. These critics, in the conclusion of their paper entitled “The Role of Youths in Social Development”, emphasize that:

For any meaningful development, youths have a role to play in any given society. Societies are called upon to make use of their youths judiciously instead of allowing them to roam about the streets of the town causing troubles, intoxicating themselves, stealing and to some extent raping. Youths should not be allowed to be nuisance in our society... Youths are the greatest assets any society can be proud of as they are the backbone of societal development (8).

Thus, literature in general and specifically the novel genre, as pointed out earlier, remain indispensable tool of curving the various manifestations of conflicts and insecurity thereby achieving cohesion, peace and harmony for sustainable national development. As Adedjoja (2019) asserts, “Literature should continue to promote peaceful resolution of conflict in human society and literary artists should be encouraged to expose societal vices through their creative imaginations without molestation and intimidation from government” (132). Against this background, this paper examines the role of youth, who judiciously deploy mediation rather than confrontation or violence in resolving the persistent conflict between their parents (the rich and the poor) caused by the economic exploitation as vividly portrayed in Obafemi’s *Wheels*.

### **Mediation as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution**

Mediation is a method of conflict resolution that requires the use of a third party – an intermediary. Differently put, it is a method that provides opportunities to parties in conflict to come together to negotiate in order to resolve the misunderstanding or disagreement, and reach a decision that both are prepared to live with, although with the same degree of satisfaction. Pointedly, mediators or interveners are sought within the communities or societies of the parties concerned. The mediator may be an individual or group of individuals (like Kofo and his friends in *Wheels*) working with the disputing parties to help them improve their level of communication and their analysis of the conflict situation. However, mediators lack the authority to impose their decisions, or judgements on the parties. Rather, they act as facilitators, whose primary “aim is to transform the dynamics of the conflict situation by introducing new relevant knowledge or information, especially regarding the negotiation process between the disputants, by revealing common interests and suggesting possible directions towards settlement,” (Godongs, 2005:115).

Mediation has been defined by the United Nations University for Peace as: “The voluntary, informal, non-binding process undertaken by an external party that fosters the settlement of differences or demands between directly invested parties” (quoted in Miller, 2003:23). And in Theresa and Oluwafemi’s (2014) words, “It is an old method of conflict management

surrounded by secrecy. It involves non-coercive intervention of the mediators called third party either to reduce or... go beyond or bring conflict to peaceful settlement” (149). From these definitions, it is clear that mediation process is a means of ensuring that normalcy returns not necessarily as an end to the conflict; but expected to convince the conflicting parties to identify and choose an option for resolving differences that meet the interests or needs of all the disputants.

Therefore, mediation is an assistance by a third party where the parties to a conflict admit that they have a problem which they are both committed to resolving, but in which the mediator manages a negotiation process, but does not impose a solution on the parties. In essence, the role of the mediator is to create the enabling environment for the parties to carry out dialogue sessions (like the party organized by the youngsters as a symposium in *Wheels*) leading to the resolution of a pending conflict.

### **Analysis of *Wheels***

As the only novel (to date) written by Olu Obafemi, the prolific Nigerian playwright, *Wheels* is a chronicles of Musa Sonja’s life, a gallant veteran, who is forced to retire because of his low level of education after the hard-won war he fiercely fought. Throughout the story, Sonja severely criticises his exploiters, notably Seun’s and Gbenga’s fathers. He tries, by all means, to end the friendship of his son with the children of tormentors. However, his wife, Abeke, persuades him to allow Kofo to define his life by himself. Expressing their candid view on the setting of the novel, Jonah and Isah (2021) explain that:

*Wheels* is a text set in an emerging capitalists environment of Giro (the temporal setting of the text). Giro is a representation of a growing urban centre where traditional factors of production (Capital, Labour and Land) are available. Symptomatic of any urban and capitalist space is the idea of industry and suffice therefore to establish the growing mantra of industrialisation portrayed in the text (214).

Fundamentally, there are two classes of people in *Wheels*: the old and young generations. In the old generation, there are poor people represented by Sonja (Kofo's father), Pa Garuba (Lanre's father), Koori and Saidu's nameless father while the rich people are represented by Pa Ilori (Kemi's father), Pa Oropo (Seun's father) and Papa Gbenga (Gbenga's father). On the other hand, the young generation comprises many ambitious young men and women, such as Kofo, Seun, Kemi, Gbenga, Seidu, Lola and Lanre. Others are Musa, Achor, Mathias, Remi, Ngozi and Ada. Through the cinematic portrayal of these characters, particularly the youngsters, Obafemi artistically portrays the essential role of youth in resolving conflict caused by the economic exploitation of the elites. Specifically, Kofo, Kemi, Seun and Gbenga are the youth whose purposeful contributions in restoring peace and harmony in Giro town deserve critical commendation.

### **Kofo Ebeji: A Messianic and Reformist Youth**

Kofo, the protagonist-cum-narrator in the novel, tries to make his father understand the realities throughout the narrative. Thus, when Sonja angrily challenges him for staying together with the children of the exploiters, he persuasively replies to him, "My friends are innocent. They are not part of their parents' wrong deeds. Indeed, they don't like what happened this afternoon" (115). Being adamant, self-opinionated and unforgiving, Sonja totally opposes his son's views. However, as messianic and reformist, Kofo pitifully says to his penurious father:

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

Yet Sonja regards his son's statement as childish. He is unconvinced. To prove his vehement stance about it, he bursts into a rather hysterical laughter of anguish and then rhetorically asks Kofo, "You young ones? Are your experiences the same? Some of you, their children in those mansions over there, those who eat meat, butter and drink fresh milk, and you poor lots here

who drink Akamu, garri and fura, do you share the same spirit?” (121). This, however, does not deter or discourage Kofo’s zeal. Instead, it energizes him with much courage and determination. As he once again tells to 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 see. I can feel. I go to school with other poor children who walk barefoot because they cannot afford the money for the cheapest tennis shoes. I go to school with rich children brought and fetched back in long and flashy cars. But I beat them all at school. They learn at my feet. I teach them Arithmetic, English and even General Science, my weakest subject. I struggle through the pain of my humble background and they still envy my brain, Papa. They, the rich and we, the poor, walk, 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. Papa, I promise (122).

In essence, the above references depict how Kofo employs persuasive language in order to convince his father who often attacks the rich people. He assures his father that the ‘Wheel’ can easily be turned if the young ones are given the chance.

### **Kemi Kuforiji: A Revolutionary and Visionary Youth**

Through the portrayal of Kemi, the young ambitious lady, Obafemi artistically depicts that women also have a significant role to play in peace making and conflict resolution, especially in contemporary Nigerian society. When Kemi reaches home after she secretly meets with Kofo, her parents notice her unseemly appearance – there is mud all over her body and her ribbon and diamond hair clip are gone. Pa Ilori (Dayo), her affluent father, harshly says to her



“Somebody has been having it out on you. Children of those brutes. Those never-do-wells out there on the grass in my friend’s house this afternoon. Those blunt heads whose lot is poverty. They’ve set their crude and ill-mannered thugs against my daughter” (117). However, Kemi, like Kofo, never supports her father. Thus, she protests against her father’s critical view on the poor in favour of Kofo, her affectionate boyfriend:

No dad. Kofo’s parents are not beasts. They are just poor, that’s all. Poverty is not a sin. They did not bring it upon themselves... We make them what they are... the poor ones. The farmers who can’t pay their children’s school fees. The ex-soldiers who get mud splashed by our fanciful cars, as they ride their second-hand bicycles... the market women who travel for miles to fetch the meat and fish which dress our dinner dishes... We turn them into angry lots. We then turn round to call them brutes... (118).

Kemi’s boldness earns her several slaps from her fuming and furious father. Not only Kemi, even her mother, who tries to side with her gets her own share of the punishment. He pushes her to the floor resulting to her motionless collapse. Narrating her terrible encounter with her father to Kofo, Kemi tearfully says:

Your poverty, Kofo, I now know is the doing of people like Papa, standing in for the big exploiters to rape our land, our natural wealth and our gift of resources and creating poverty for the vast majority of our people. I had to make the point for Papa’s benefit. He lost his patience and hate took over from his usual decency, polish and panache. His animal instinct took over. He hit me hard across the face and I fell down and fainted. But not until his gun had boomed. He had pulled the trigger of his army

officer's gun... I woke up in the clinic the next morning. Kofo, the damage has been done (131).

Thus, in order to comfort his beloved Kemi, Kofo, too, narrates to her his miserable encounter with his splenetic father:

I had my exchange with my father who also lost his patience, blew his top because I came home late from a meeting with you, Gbenga and Seun. Papa almost disowned me for sharing what he terms a leprous association with the children of his tormentors (132).

Pointedly, Kemi's father's unnatural deed does not discourage or threaten her from the campaign to end "The endless seasons of poverty and deprivation" (132) in Giro, being a revolutionary and visionary youth. She participates actively in organizing the get-together party.

### **Seun and Gbenga: The Insightful and Determined Youth**

Likewise, through the portrayal of Seun and Gbenga, Obafemi also presents youth who are relentless in pursuit of their goal. Despite their splendid and lavish life-style, they are ready to fight for the poor people of Giro. They are complete opposite of their selfish parents who pretend to know nothing about the misery and humiliation masses experience. Like Kofo and Kemi, Seun and Gbenga also start their campaign from their homes. Seun profusely thanks and commends Kofo for enlightening him about the problem in their community:

You are such a deep visionary, Kofo. A sensitive artist. All-knowing, saying very little. You have in all your quiet and silence, opened our minds and eyes into the conflicts which govern our lives. As Kemi spoke to me, and put all the evidences before me, evidences of the exploitation of our land, Kofo, it was your voice I heard (129).

Thus, immediately after their secret meeting in the village square, Seun directly heads back home to tell his father the truth. On reaching there, he keeps mute and refuses to talk to anyone. He does not greet his father's business accomplices whom he now regards as one of these exploiters and tormentors. When his father insists that he must shake hands with his important guests or the 'big people' as he calls them from abroad, Seun vehemently protests against it because he considers it a sin. He angrily tells to his father:

I have said good evening Papa. Isn't that enough? Why must you subject me to this exercise of handshaking? My hand is full of blood stain already, can't you see? How many young children of my age have lost their lives due to hunger, diseases and all sorts of hardships as a result of frequent handshakes such as this between you and all your business associates Papa? Please hurry up with your guests. I have many questions to ask you this evening. Please try to round up your meeting. I need to learn and unlearn a lot about life which only you can explain to me (134).

This really infuriates Baba Seun to the extent that saliva spurts from his mouth. He calls Seun "tiny ungrateful wretch" (134). Since then, he is regarded as a stranger in the house. His pocket money was stopped. This, however, does not stop him from his campaign. Together with his friends who are also determined and insightful, he organizes a get-together party in order to treat the rich and the poor in Giro equally and bring an end to their economic exploitation.

On his part, Gbenga also tactically demonstrates his resistance to the miserable life poor people are subjected to by exploiters like his father in Giro. In other words, his father is among the "agents of white business men and their companies who are looting the native mineral resources and seizing their lands" (137). Thus, he is ever ready for change. To encourage his friends on their mission of bringing an end to the injustice turning their society apart, Gbenga charges them:

We are worms, young children. We are snails and millipedes. We see the rings across the waists of huge rubber and we think they are made by rains from age to age. As children, we are meant to just watch. We watch hatred and long periods of injustice and inequality tear our people into tiny shreds of haters until blood begins to flow (127).

The reference above lucidly reveals how committed Gbenga is in his tireless campaign for peace and conflict resolution in Giro. After their secret meeting with Kofo, Kemi and Seun, he wastes no time in reaching home. Unfortunately, his father has not returned as expected. He only met his mother with “an evil-looking, mischief-making old man” (138) whom his mother obediently calls Baba. He is a famous old soothsayer who predicts the present and the future. Hence, Mama (Gbenga’s mother) extravagantly spends money on soothsayers like Baba to ask Ifa/Orunmila to protect her husband wherever he is. She then implores him to tell her the whereabouts of her husband. She desperately says to him “Papa. Tell me quickly. I cannot interpret the language of the gods. That is why I called you here. I am ready to pay you anything you make your price. I will give everything. But tell everything immediately” (139). On hearing this, Gbenga frankly says to his mother:

No, Mama. He won’t speak. He has nothing to say. His bag is full of deceit. Let’s give him a large glass of whisky to open his tongue and make him conjure new wiles... None, Mama. None. This is another phase of the on-going history of exploitation. The mythic side of exploitation (140).

Angered by Gbenga’s outrage, the old soothsayer churns out some obvious incantations meant to scare him, but Gbenga is unperturbed. He orders the old man to quickly pack his divination objects and leave otherwise he will show him his true identity of being the son of a general.

### **The Get-Together Party: A Symposium for Peace and Conflict Resolution**

In a bid to treat the rich and the poor people in Giro town equally, Kofo and his contemporaries, especially the children of the few well-to-do, organize a get-together party. The idea of organizing the party comes up due to the ignoble treatment the poor people receive in front of Seun's father's mansion while introducing the exploitative mechanized farming to the teeming but vulnerable masses. Pointedly, the author employs simple and straightforward language to enable readers grasp the meaning of the text easily and understand clearly how poor people suffer untold hardship in Giro because of the economic exploitation. Yakubu and Kinrin (2021) opine that, "The Language in Olu Obafemi's *Wheels* is accessible thereby making his message to be well understood. His choice of familiar words to describe the plight of the poor in society makes him popular among the common man" (22). Thus, in his welcome address, Seun's father uses simple language to clearly explain to the poor people like Sonja that they are not equal. He totally ignores the presence of the poor people there; he solely concentrates on the rich, his class... "Your Royal Highness, I greet you... Our brothers on the high table, big people and illustrious achievers who have brought great many things to this great town of ours, I salute you" (98). This further lightens the fire of hatred and enmity between them. In fact, it provokes Sonja to seize the microphone from Seun's father and also greet his fellow masses. He shrills, "Great men and women of Giro. I salute you all of the suffering people of our land... My people. We don get enough yeye from our own people wey dey for power. I don talk my own finish. Cock no get anoder name. Na cock we call am" (100).

Similarly, when Kemi tries to convince Kofo to accept the offer of her love and forgets about his humble background, he frankly and categorically explains to her the dichotomy between them. While she is the daughter of a fabulously wealthy man, he is the son of a stinking pauper. In fact, to clarify his points better, he heartily says:

Look at what happened this afternoon: Your parents and Seun's arena are on the other side. Their heads were covered by canopies. They sat on cushioned turfs and chairs with bright showers of light and flowers in front of them. My parents and the other common people, the market women and their

children, they all stand on the grass, under the scorching sun. They sweat and the salt water flow freely into the hungry babies strapped on the mother's backs. I know the taste of the sweat as I have myself swallowed it countless times. You don't Kemi. And that is the difference (110-111).

These and similar other instances in the novel depict the capitalistic nature of Giro community. In other words, it portrays a society where few individuals control everything and the majority of the people (the poor ones) are left to suffer and face all sorts of difficulties and miseries of life.

Hence, the young generation of Giro organizes a get-together party. The party is a means to an end but not an end in itself. It serves dual purposes: to rekindle their friendship and to reconcile their parents who are at loggerhead for many years. Kofo is chosen to be the Master of Ceremony but he delegated it to Kemi being more sociable, amicable and vivacious. Gbenga acts as the Dee-Jay. The narrative reveals how elegantly Kemi performs her role:

Kemi has her gentle smile ever photo-ready. Anyone would be easily disarmed and made welcome when Kemi confronts you with the glamorous beam on her face. Kemi briskly ushers in every guest into the hall. Even when her own parents walk in, she shows no extra emotions. It is the same courtesy, the same civilized and high-culture smile. The same trim, elegant and brisk walk (141).

That is not all of Kemi's determined personality. When Mama Kofo arrives, Kemi kneels down, greets her and draws a chair next to Baba Seun for her to sit. She did this purposely to show to her rich parents that poor people are equally important and should, therefore, be treated with high esteem, dignity and utmost respect. At this juncture, it is equally important to note that Mama Kofo, too, is a peace loving individual like Kemi. She prefers mediation and conciliation to confrontation and violence in resolving conflict. She totally dislikes her husband's

unforgiving nature. When he tried to terminate Kofo's friendship with the children of the rich, Abeke's soothing voice is audibly heard:

My husband. Let us not teach the child how to hate.  
Let him find out himself. Maybe with his education,  
the inequality and poverty of today may become a  
thing of the past. Let us give him his own chance.  
Their own lives may hold the promise to the future  
(122).

In essence, the party is the best of its kind. Interestingly, Mama Kofo, who is left on bare grass under the scorching sun in front of Seun's father's mansion, now sit very close to Papa Seun himself on the high table. It is really a remarkable achievement. Arguably, one can say that the youngsters have won. On noticing this, Kemi gladly tells to Kofo:

They are all coming. This gathering will be such a success. Make sure your statement, your opening speech, is very powerful. Make sure we make the points, that the rich ones and the not-so-rich ones get to hear the feelings of we the young generation. let them know that unity, solidarity in seeking independence are what we need to recapture our land, our mineral resources and more importantly, our dignity, from the imperialists, our foreign contractors (142).

Thus, even when Kofo shows reluctance in acting the role assigned to him because of the huge gathering, Kemi, being ever active and assertive, charges him:

Stop being a coward. Yes, I know you are not a coward. The moment of courage is the moment truth drops like a bomb in a silent room. Remember, do not off until tomorrow what you can do today. We

must not miss this opportunity to alert our parents to the dangers of permanent conflict raging on our land (143).

Even with this, Kofo is too shy to speak in such a huge gathering. Kemi quickly breaks the ominous silence and declares the ceremony open. She heartily welcomes all the guests and also announces that Pa Oropo (Seun's father) is the chairman of the occasion. As the chairman, Pa Oropo profusely thanks the youngsters for the invitation. He commends them for their tireless efforts and enthusiastically says:

I feel highly honoured by this invitation. I am particularly proud of our children who have put this activity together. Our elders say that if our masquerade dances well in a festival of dances we are overjoyed. I am very proud and elated by the maturity displayed by our children today. I hope that this will be a sign for the future as only such mature togetherness can bring peace and unity to our land... With mature, insightful and disciplined children like you, the future of our land is assured. My advice to all of you is that you emulate what is positive and noble from us your parents. Grab the future and turn your education into an instrument of development and civilization such that can make our nation truly great... Learn to love each other and avoid evil indoctrination from some of our parents who have not learnt to forgive and forget the past. I wish you a very delightful evening and many happy years ahead (145).

Significantly, from Pa Oropo's oratorical address, it is obvious that he aspires for a change through mediation and conciliation. He wants the disheartened poor people to 'forgive and



forget' the past and solely concentrates on the future in order to turn Giro town to a more prosperous place than ever before.

Also, Pa Garuba, the representative of farmers' co-operatives, is given the chance to speak. He avers:

Ladies and Gentlemen, our illustrious children. I thank you for inviting a poor, farm-going, yam-eating man like me into a gathering of educated people... My prayer is that our children will continue to bring many more new things to our land for the benefit of our people. As a farmer, I have no stomach for polished lies. We give words and meaning to the rhythm of the season. Truth is the hallmark of good harvest... Our land bleeds with poverty, but our rich ones look the other way and pretend that they cannot see. My children, if it will have meaning, life must be built on truth, good conscience and love. Real love, not the love between a goat and a piece of yam. Only on this basis will a future, freed of betrayal, deceit and oppression be assured on our land. That is all I have come here to say... I thank you and may our tribe increase (146-7).

Obviously, earnestness and genuineness of Pa Garuba's speech annoy some of the rich people, such as Seun's parents who instantly take their leave but his insightful son's booming voice is audibly heard on the microphone persuading them to stay:

Dad and Mum. Don't leave. Don't go. This is the time and age when truth like smoke must rise to the sky. Let us hear the truth out for the sake of the future. Let us uncover the sore and prescribe a cure.

Truth is like a splash of muddy water. If it splashes on you, please check yourself (147).

Emphatically, the children of the well-to-do are ever ready for change. Despite their life of luxury, they are not in support of their parents' exploitation of the innocent teeming masses. They earnestly want to devise a means or rather a mechanism of finding a lasting solution to the injustice and humiliation meted out to the poor people by their exploitative and capitalistic parents. Likewise, the dialogue below between Kofo and Kemi graphically portrays the decisiveness and resoluteness of the youngsters in restoring peace in Giro town:

'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. Kofo, don't you think so?'

'Yes, not to give up is to win. But we must never underestimate the depth of the gulf, the seriousness of the great divide.'

'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 with courage (150).'

Thus, at the tail end of the party, it is gratifying for the children to see Papa Gbenga turns round and offers to take Mama Kofo home in his flashy car. Though she shakes her head to politely indicate her disapproval because she is not used to it, yet it is a great achievement on the part of the children. It symbolizes the beginning of their success. As Kofo reveals "It has never happened before, and somehow, we all feel that it will happen again. Somehow, there is a feeling of change, of a new earth emerging from our gathering" (149). Hence, they unanimously agree that "Whatever we do from now on, all of us students, home and abroad, rich and poor, clever or dull, we must do it together. Everybody must know about it and it must be a collective decision" (153). However, Seun shows a sign of disagreement to their stance but Kemi frankly challenges him:

There is nothing confusing in all these, Seun. We open the debate, inform our colleagues about the rampant culture of hate on our land. Together we trace the source, the cause and the reason for the

inequalities. Look, the white man is cutting our timber, exploiting and carting away our oil, milking our cocoa and coffee, bleeding the sides of our rubber trees. Our rich parents are supporting and enabling it. Nothing comes to our people by way of benefits and amenities. Our poor lot have no farms to go to and hunger reigns. Lets stop the music and waste no more time (154).

Ultimately, there is a consensus that all the students shall take a walk to the river-side where white people perpetuate all sorts of injurious activities to the detriment of the teeming masses of Giro and vehemently revolt against it. Like a comic drama, the novel ends with a rapturous ovation from all the students singing that “Tomorrow we match/Tomorrow we match/End to Enmity/Down with Exploiters” (157).

### **Conclusion**

Significantly, it should be understood that Obafemi’s *Wheels* principally depicts the abject poverty, squalor and quagmire the poor people in Giro are subjected to due to the economic exploitation of the capitalist class. Through the graphic portrayal of youth represented by Kofo and his contemporaries, who have championed the cause of the masses rights, the author portrays himself as a writer of intense social commitment who regards youth as key figures and active agents of political and social reforms. Also, through their portrayal, he explicitly points out that mediation and conciliation rather than confrontation or violence is the best method of resolving conflict. Finally, it is our optimism that Nigerian youth, will emulate the sterling and exemplary character of Kofo and his friends in bringing an end to the persistent problem of BH insurgency, banditry, degradation, kidnapping, inordinate materialism, urban youth violence, assassination, general insecurity and hate bedeviling the Nigerian nation.

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