

Proverbs and Figurative Expressions as Markers of Feminist Ideology in Selected Femi Osofisan Plays

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Abstract

Literature abounds on the way gender issues are foregrounded in both literary and non-literary texts. Many of these studies, especially from the linguistic perspective, fail to pay attention to how proverbs and figurative expressions are used to expose feminist ideology in discourse. This study, therefore, considers the way these cultural elements are used to express the feminist beliefs of Femi Osofisan in some of his drama texts to lend credence to the argument that every genre of text and talk is capable of bearing ideological nuances.

The study deploys Norman Fairclough's socio-cultural model of CDA which incorporates aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) as theoretical model. Three of Osofisan's drama texts, which mostly express his feminist tendencies; *Morountodun*, *YungbaYungba and the Dance Contest* and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* are purposively sampled to explain the expressive capabilities of women. Proverbs and figurative expressions are subjected to descriptive linguistic analysis to bring out the underlying gender rhetoric. Osofisan projects women's ability to use proverbs and figures of speech to express power. There is the overriding feminist ideology of women as expressive and dynamic in the texts.

1 Introduction

Studies both in the literary and linguistic fields have examined the way language contributes to the suppression of women and sometimes proffer possible solutions. Beyond scholarship, stakeholders have also met at various times to discuss the way out of the quagmire. One of such efforts is the remarkable Beijing Conference. The conference is remarkable for bringing a defining course to feminist issues and studies. Ever since the conference took place, approaches to gender issues and studies have changed. Feminist studies, importantly, now have shades and specific areas of focus. Again, from being a subject of concern to its direct beneficiaries, the female gender, some men have also considered feminist studies an interesting field of research that could be ventured into. In the Western bloc, Barthold (1981) and Eagleton (1985) are leading lights in feminist studies. In the Nigerian cycle, not many literary and non-literary studies have emanated from the male folk. Some who managed to mention the female gender in their works such as Oyesakin (1985) and Opadokun (1991) downplayed rather than foreground them. However, other men have attempted to foreground the female gender in their scholarly efforts. Prominent among these are Achebe's *Anthills of the Savanna* (1987), Soyinka's *The lion and the jewel* and Ola Rotimi's *Our husbands have gone mad again* both published in the 1960s. In

a more recent study from the linguistic point of view, Lamidi's (2009) effort at de-emphasising the linguistic devaluation of women cannot be underestimated.

Expectedly, many women the world over (and particularly in Nigeria) have deployed literary and linguistic tools to clamour for gender equality. This cannot be taken for granted because much as these efforts abound, it is not every woman who believes in the struggle for gender equality and appreciates the efforts of their fellow women. Some are complacent while others believe it is divine for women to be suppressed. Be that as it may, Femi Osofisan's efforts in projecting the female gender cannot be overemphasised. His gender notwithstanding, Osofisan seems to have authored the largest number of female-centred texts ranging from drama to poetry. With over 50 drama texts to his credit and a reasonable number out of these devoted to the celebration of womanhood, no other Nigerian author, whether male or female, possibly has such credentials.

Unfortunately, his works have not received a commensurate level of attention especially in the critical feminist linguistic category. Most of the works on Osofisan focus on literary analyses of these texts which makes appraisal one-sided. Also, where his drama texts are subjected to linguistic analyses, the way cultural elements, which are usually copiously deployed in his texts, are used to express gendered beliefs have not received much scholarly attention. Hence, the present study attempts a critical discourse analysis of three of Femi Osofisan's plays with focus on his use of proverbs and figurative colourations to reveal his feminist ideology.

1.1 Nigerian women and gender balancing

Yusuf (2006) notes that both English and Yoruba languages demonstrate sexist tendencies through proverbs. Okolo (1998) also strongly condemns the role which the English language performs as a tool for male chauvinism. Yusuf (2006) and Daniel (2008) have also challenged what they call the power structure in the traditional trend of male supremacist languages such as English. They argue for example that the item *mankind* is a generic term for all people, while *womankind* is not. This is equally true of the generic meaning of the items *man*, and *manmad*. According to Brosmijian (1972) there is a *housewife* but no *house husband*; there is a *kitchen maid* but no *kitchenman*. The prevalent situation, notwithstanding, gender sensitive scholars have not remained silent. Studies have continued to emerge on how to challenge the status quo and entrench a new order.

Beyond language, women as individuals and groups are culpable. Despite the gender debates permeating every aspect of national discourse, Nigerian women appear to be far from self-actualization or maybe they are merely paying lip service to the call for gender equality.

1.2 Femi Osofisan and overview of the plays

Professor Babafemi Adeyemi Osofisan was born on the 16th of June 1946 in Iloto, near Ijebu Ode, Ogun State. He attended Government College, Ibadan between 1959 and 1965. He proceeded to the University of Ibadan in 1966 and finished in 1969. He also studied at the University of Dakar and the Novel Sorbonne in Paris and later came back to complete his doctoral degree in the University of Ibadan in 1974. He was appointed a professor and made the Head of the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Benin (1983-1985). He has authored more than 50 drama texts and gender issues manifest greatly in a larger chunk of these plays. Three

of these, *Morountodun* published in 1982, *YungbaYungba and the Dance Contest* published in 1993 and *Tegonni: an African Antigone* (1995) are selected for this study.

Morountodun centres on the farmers' uprising which is popularly known as Agbekoya in the late 1960's in the western part of the country. The protagonist, Titubi, threads the path of the legendary Moremi of Ile-Ife, to demand an improved welfare for the peasants. In the long run, the peasants and government negotiate, the former gets a better deal from government and peace returns to the hitherto turbulent town.

Like in *Morountodun*, the preoccupation of *Tegonni: An African Antigone* is to showcase the issue of personal courage and determination as portrayed in the character of the protagonist, Tegonni who engages herself in an open confrontation with the British colonial governor of her town to demand for a better treatment for the natives.

In *YungbaYungba and the Dance Contest*, there is a clash between the ideal and the corrupt. The play presents a group of young who advocate the entrenchment of democracy as against the one-man dictatorial government under which their community is subjugated. In the end, they are able to put an end to the unpopular dictatorial government of Iyeneri.

2 Literature review

A number of studies have examined the role of language in the perceived suppression of women, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. These studies, such as Yusuf (2006) and Akindele and Adegbite (2005), reveal that the English language, just as cultural factors, contributes to gender inequality. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) argue that in the African culture, there are penalties for women who interrupt men in a conversation. This is done in order to sustain the beliefs that promote the asymmetry between the male and the female gender. Therefore, it is not proper for a female to interrupt a male in a conversation, particularly in public places. According to them, women ask questions as indirect objections and men appear to ignore their objections and feelings. They believe that women's questions are meant to solicit information to which men react defensively. Women tend to give courtesy words more than men. Men rather present direct, blunt and offensive words. They give directives and regard conversation as a means of exchanging information or solving problems rather than connecting emotionally with others. Men tend to discuss such topics that relate to events and happenings as news, sports and so on. Much as Akindele and Adegbite's (2005) could be said to be true, there are cases of exemption as the present study shall reveal.

Given that language contributes to gender inequality, Adiukwu-Bogunjoko's (2002) and Daniel's (2008) works reveal the culpability of women in the elongation of the gender struggle. These studies underscore the fact that women have attitudinal issues which affect the level of confidence that could be reposed in them by the opposite sex. For instance, Adiukwu-Bogunjoko (2002) argues that women have been seen as lacking in leadership qualities. According to her, Nigerian women are cut off from power positions as well as from the stepping stones and access routes that lead towards leadership. This, she posits, is because discrimination by men may be less crucial or less lasting than the consciousness of women themselves of their subordinate or inferior status in the society, not minding the lip service of the women-awareness campaigns going through the whole country. Her position is similar to that of Daniel (2008)

who carries out a pictorial and linguistic analysis of the portrayal of women in selected Nigerian newspapers. In her study, she finds that women assume inferior status through their lack of self-confidence as revealed by their poses in the photographs published in newspapers. She mentions that some of the dresses worn by these women suggest their helplessness and desperation to get attention. She also argues that women use less of action verbs which play down on their level of assertiveness.

Contrary to Adiukwu-Bogunjoko's (2002) and Daniel's (2008) observations, other studies have explored the way gender issues are portrayed in texts to the end that the clamour for gender equality can be guaranteed. These studies such as Ezeigbo (1996), Owoeye (2007), Lamidi (2009), Lamidi and Akinmameji (2013), and Ezeife (2014) deploy the methods of critical discourse analysis to bring out the underlying feminist issues associated with language use in both linguistic and literary categories. Each of these studies considers aspects of the relationship that holds between language and gender. Ezeigbo (1996) and Owoeye (2007) are efforts in the literary perspective. Lamidi (2009) looks at the use of gender-neutral pronouns while the concern of Lamidi and Akinmameji (2009) is an elucidation of how names are used to express gender. Ezeife (2014) x-rays the deployment of lexical choices to express gendered authorial ideology in a selected literary text. From the foregoing, it is arguable that the connection between language and gender has largely received scholarly attention. It must, however, be stated that none of these efforts, especially from the linguistic perspective, has explained the way proverbs and figurative expressions are used to express gender. This is the concern of the present study.

3 Theoretical framework

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a sociolinguistic theory explains the relationship existing among language, power and ideology. Over the years, not only have there been offshoots of this theory, there have also emerged trends and approaches to CDA. Prominent among these models are the discourse-historical popularised by Ruth Wodak, socio-cultural model by Norman Fairclough and socio-cognitive model elucidated in the works of Teun van Dijk. Of these three models, Norman Fairclough's socio-cultural model of critical discourse analysis is selected as the theoretical framework for this research. This model is chosen because of its ability to explain the nature of social power and ideological perspectives captured between the male and female characters in Osofisan's plays. The analytical foci of this approach in analyzing any communicative event (interaction) are text, discourse practice (the process of production and consumption) and socio-cultural practice, that is what obtains in reality. Fairclough (1995) also suggests that the socio-cultural framework attempts to relate structures of discourse with the structures of society such as social properties or relations of class, gender or ethnicity. These are systematically associated with the structural units, levels or strategies of talk and text embedded in their social, political and cultural contexts.

Fairclough (1995, 2003, and 2010) argues that language shapes people's social identities and interactions, while knowledge systems and beliefs are also shaped by them. This is the point of connection between CDA and Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). As a linguistic model, SFG focuses on how speakers of a language generate utterances and texts to convey intended meanings. As the name suggests, linguistic analysis in SFG is systematic. The central theme of SFG is an examination of the functions that language performs; that is, the functionality of

language. As Lyons (1981) observes, the phonological, grammatical and semantic structures of a text contribute to meaning in language. The SFG is a theory which stipulates the possibility of systematically deriving unlimited meanings from a limited choice of words.

The goal of SFG is to raise awareness of how a learner appropriately communicates meaning rather than learning any specific grammatical point. This is achieved by facilitating certain kinds of social and interpersonal interactions representing ideas about the world, connecting these ideas and interactions into meaningful texts and making them relevant to their context (Halliday, 1978). Much as SFG provides the platform for language users to link the meaning of an utterance to the larger world, it fails to explain the nature of ideologies which such utterances express. Hence, many times when the method of CDA is adopted as theoretical model, SFG is adopted as a complementary model to enhance a robust linguistic analysis. This study uses Fairclough's three level analyses: description, interpretation and explanation, to carry out a systematic analysis of the linguistic categories drawn out from the texts to demonstrate the way gender issues are explicated.

3.1 Research methodology

Three of Femi Osofisan's plays: *Morountodun* (1982), *YungbaYungba and the dance contest* (1993) and *Tegonni: An African Antigone* (1995) are purposively sampled for this study because, out of all the plays written by Osofisan, these three extensively express his feminist ideology. These plays project women's ability to use power expressions manifesting in their deployment of proverbs and figures of speech. The identified figures of speech include metaphors, similes, personification, euphemism and allusion. The plays also reveal, to a large extent, Osofisan's feminist tendencies. The study carries out a descriptive analysis of these larger scale structures with a view to instantiating the way they are used to depict the dynamism of the female gender. The gendered cultural elements are also subjected to critical linguistic analysis with a view to showcasing the feminist orientation that they portray. Norman Fairclough's approach to critical discourse analysis is adopted as the theoretical model for this study because more than the other models, it explains the relationship of discourses to processes of struggle and expression of power.

4 Data analysis

Analyses of the various excerpts culled for this study are presented subsequently. The analyses are done by identifying, interpreting and explaining specific linguistic items such as: nouns, pronouns, verb and lexical collocation which expose the feminist ideology of the writer.

4.1 Deployment of proverbs to express feminist ideology

In this subsection, effort is made to provide a brief description of important concepts such as ideology and proverbs, and the way they both interact to reveal the feminist ideology in the drama texts.

4.1.1 Ideology

Ideologies are belief systems that are socially shared by the members of a group of social actors (van Dijk, 2003). This group could either be political, social or professional. As scholarship

expanded, the concept of ideology has grown into different shades such that Marxism, modernism, post-modernism, feminism, and others are possibilities. The focus of this research is on the brand of ideology that preaches equality between the male and the female gender, known as feminist ideology or feminism. The concern of the present research is an analysis of the way feminist ideology manifests in the selected drama texts. This is because, as Threadgold (1989) observes, written and spoken discourses are not just linguistic categories but are among the very processes by which dominant ideologies are produced, transmitted and potentially changed. Moreover, the attitudes, points of view and values that a discourse possesses also help in establishing the way ideology influences gender in discourse.

4.1.2 Proverbs

Proverbs are usually short, well-known, concise saying which states a general truth or piece of advice. Proverbs are useful in expressing deep thoughts and one's ideological beliefs. When a proverb is deployed in a particular situation, such is usually embedded with meanings and it takes only the analytical minds to decode what is being said. Proverbs help garnish one's expressions especially in the traditional African society. Rather than use direct and somewhat dry expressions, the proper deployment of proverbs could be a marker of soundness, profundity and a deep understanding of the subject being discussed. Little wonder Achebe (1958) argues that proverbs are like palm oil with which words are eaten. Arguably, one of the elements that add colour to language use is proverbs. In the selected texts for this study, proverbs are not merely selected to add colour, they express gendered beliefs. In this sub-section, proverbs shall be treated as a form of grammatical structure which is catered for in Fairclough's (1989) larger scale structures.

Suffice it to state here that proverbs can be used as a means of gender distinction in patriarchal societies. It is one of the known methods through which men exert their superiority over women. According to Hussein (2005), men tend to communicate with confidence and air of independence to preserve their social and political status in the social hierarchy through proverbs. Women on the other hand prefer to be co-operative and less harsh to maintain high modesty which the hierarchy requires of them. Hence, gender ideology figures largely in proverbs and the way the society perceives them as men and women. Proverbs as a form of language and a vehicle for the transmission of culture are used to express this ideology and live to these gender-based expectations (Nhlekisana 2009). Corroborating this fact, Dogbevi (2007) argues that proverbs are the foundation of social and cultural wisdom and therefore serve as the basis for formulating concepts that govern social relations which include gender relations. He further argues that due to the patriarchal nature of the African society (and by implication Nigerian society), the subordination of women has been prominently expressed in proverbs and as such most Yoruba proverbs are biased against women even though a few portray them positively (Hussein, 2005).

Judging from the above, one may argue that many Nigerian proverbs are used to entrench patriarchy. Thus, one would have expected to find such instances from the texts under consideration basically because the writer is a male. On the contrary, the playwright deploys gender-balanced proverbs. Examples of such proverbs which depict feminist ideology in the texts include:

- 1 Two **hands**, they say are needed to lift a load! As you give a chance to male, so must you do to the female for it is only that way that **harmony** comes to the land

(Osofisan 1993: 24f.)

Ayoka's reference to "two hands" enforces the need for gender equality. The Webster Online Dictionary of English explains that the noun *hand* can be used to refer to a person. Little wonder we hear expressions like *I saw your hand*. This expression usually does not mean that a person's literal hand is seen. Instead, it, mostly, suggests the input or contribution of a person on a particular issue. Furthermore, the same dictionary notes that *hand* represents 'power, possession or control'. These definitions of *hand* underline it as a very important part of the human body. Hence, in the proverb above, Ayoka establishes that *two hands*, that is; two individuals, male and female, have equal power and possess the ability to control or determine what happens around them. Besides, the noun *harmony* suggests a congruent arrangement of different things, and the proper functioning of the different parts to make a pleasing whole. This noun also connotes tolerance amongst the two genders. As it were, one of the two genders cannot be completely independent and perform optimally without the other. Thus, the message is that of accepting the importance of one gender to the survival of the other. These nouns, in the sense of their deployment, instantiate the feminist ideology of the writer.

Moreover, going by Hussein's (2005) argument that men are mostly allowed to use proverbs as a marker of their superiority in a communicative event between men and women, it is arguable that the ability of Osofisan's female characters to deploy proverbs in their interactions attests to the playwright's belief in gender balancing and his intention to disregard the perceived superiority/inferiority benchmarks that proverbs are made to create in the speeches of male and females. Also in

- 2 Founder of the first Guild of women casters. Do not be afraid! For it is to chase away the frown from the face that we put **honey** in the mouth! It is only the unknowing **woman** who complains that her **husband** has separated her from friends.

(Osofisan 1995: 42f.)

The noun *honey*, according to the Oxford dictionary of English Language refers to 'something that is very good'. In the excerpt above, honey is recognised as the substance that chases away "frown" from the face. Considering that the proverb centres on Tegonni, the protagonist and founder of the Guild of women casters, it is arguable that she; and by extension, the entire women folk, is the one being referred to as honey. This deployment of a positive word to describe the female gender is also a justification of the playwright's acceptance of the female gender. In this same proverb, the playwright's feminist ideology is expressed in the reference to the 'woman' and the 'man' as mutually inclusive entities. The proverb suggests that it should be the joy of any woman to be married and separated from her friends. It further suggests that women should not be comfortable doing things amongst themselves only. A cross fertilisation between men and woman would perceivably yield better results, popular amongst this is procreation which is necessary for continuity. Another proverb depicting the author's feminist ideology is:

- 3 The pounded yam may strut lot and boast of being the **queen** of the lunch table but **she** was first **moulded** and taught **her** lessons in the **womb** of the mortar

(Osofisan 1993: 6f.)

The use of feminine pronouns *she* and *her* reflects the underlying feminist ideology of the writer. Besides the use of feminine pronouns, there is also allusion to womanhood in the proverb. This is captured in the use of the nouns *queen* and *womb*. It is only women who have womb and only they can be queens. These smack of feminism. It would not have had the same implication if the pronouns were masculine and the allusions not made to womanhood. Furthermore, the proverb depicts women's transformative capabilities. An example is the use of the verb *mould* in the expression: "the pounded yam... was first moulded in the womb of the mortar". Hence, ordinary yam becomes the much celebrated pounded yam delicacy (within the Yoruba cultural setting) after its experience in the mortar. This is to say that an ordinary thing committed into the hands of the woman becomes extra-ordinary by the time she works on such.

In the heat of the preparation for the dance competition, Ma Ronke tells Rokeke, the leader of her group:

- 4 If the **cooking pot** does not lose its temper and begin to spit and whistle, how shall the **stew** fulfil its miracle with **spices**? Dance! Rokeke, dance like your **mothers**
(Osofisan 1993:15f)

The imagery of the kitchen is depicted in *cooking pot*, *stew* and *spices* in this proverb. It suggests the feminist underpinning of the writer. Women are naturally associated with the kitchen regardless of other endeavours that they engage in, especially within the Yoruba socio-cultural system. More so, the writer also seems to call on women to discover themselves, build their capacities and show their skills to the world. This is because, as the author argues, if they would not prove their worth to the world by themselves (if the cooking pot does not lose its temper...) nobody will pay attention to them, blow their horns for them, and nobody will have an insight of what they are capable of doing. Moreover, these lexical items: *cooking pot*, *spices* and *stew* create the impression of the attempt to put an end to hunger and starvation (through the provision of food). This also bears positive light on the writer's feminist ideology. It showcases the positivity of womanhood and their ability to solve problems of, for example, hunger (both physical and emotional). It is also noteworthy that Rokeke is encouraged to "dance" like her "mothers". It is important to note that the verb *dance* means more than shaking the body to the tune of music, it is also an instrument of expression and communication. Thus, it can be argued that Rokeke is told to dance like her mothers because she is expected to express or take the decision that would be accepted to womanhood, represented in the proverb as mothers. This proverb, like the earlier ones, depicts feminist ideology of the writer. It underscores the expressiveness (both verbal and non verbal) of the woman.

Another gender based proverb used in the text is:

- 5 The **pride** of the **virgin** ends on the nuptial mat.
(Osofisan 1993: 18f)

In the typical Yoruba society, virginity or chastity before marriage is encouraged. Fadipe (1970), cited in Alaba, (2004: 27) observes that: "In every division of Yoruba land, great importance was attached to a bride being *Virgo intacta* and this was the rule for both high and low alike... a bride who was found *Virgo intacta* was the cause of much rejoicing to her husband, and of rejoicing and self-congratulations to her parents and relatives". The opposite is, expectedly, the reaction to a bride who was found *non virgo intacta*. It is expected that the girl should

be deflowered by her husband on the night of their wedding, after which she ceases to be a virgin. This is required of the lady not the man. There is no way virginity test can be carried out on a man. Hence, we could argue that this proverb is gender based and it tilts towards feminism. Chastity is a virtue which ladies must possess. The role of the man in encouraging the woman to utilize her full potentials is underscored in this proverb. The virgin loses her “pride”, obviously, to the man and she consequently transforms into a full blown woman who is more mature, respected and procreative. These are the hallmarks of womanhood and to get to this level, the man must have played his role. This represents the need for gender equality.

Proverbs are also used in establishing balanced power relations between the male and the female as applicable in the following:

- 6 Superintendent: The **hunter** brings home a **grass cutter** and beats his chest. What will happen to the **elephant** killer?
 Titubi: The **shoulder** is not smaller, is it? Simply because it has chosen to wear a low-necked blouse.

(Osofisan 1982: 13f)

As earlier noted, proverbs are usually deployed by men, especially within a patriarchal setting, to show their superiority. In return, women are expected to use a less confident language form, as a show of submission (Hussein, 2005). However, the above scenario, where Titubi responds to Marshal’s proverb with another proverb is a departure and a pointer to the author’s argument that women should not necessarily be subjugated through their speech forms. Also, Marshal attempts to create a superiority/inferiority demarcation by referring to the woman as the “hunter” that kills a grass cutter, and the man as the “elephant killer”. A grass cutter is a rather small creature, and it is by every standard: size, strength, and economic value, inferior to the elephant. Nonetheless, Titubi corrects that impression by informing him that a thing is not adjudged perfect or superior because of its size or position. Hence, the shoulder is not lower because of what it wears and a woman is not inferior by the virtue of her sex.

Another effort of the playwright to portray gender equality/power equation between the two sexes is in the following:

- 7 Oronmiyon: **Subjects** only echo the **ruler’s** caprices.
 Moremi: When time presses, we discard the **horse of enigmas**

(Osofisan 1982: 36f.)

Like in example 6 above, the picture of a boss/subordinate relationship between men and women is painted through the use of *subjects*, apparently referring to the woman, and *ruler* which refers to the man, again, Moremi rebuffs this claim. For the woman, in Moremi’s projection, important decisions must be taken fast whether such is taken by the “subject”, the woman or the “horse of enigma”, the man as long as such a decision serves the utmost good.

The deployment of proverbs depicting the writer’s feminist ideology has been explained in the above sub-section. The use of figures of speech to express feminist ideology shall be considered subsequently.

4.2 Use of Figures of speech

Figures of speech provide emphasis and add colour to language use. Figurations are also taken care of under Fairclough’s (1989) larger-scale structures. Figures of speech have been placed

in this category because they usually have deep meaning, interpretations which are very different from surface or usual grammatical meanings of sentences/expressions. The writer uses a range of figures of speech in the selected texts. This, invariably, sets off feminism which is the overriding ideology in the texts. Some of the figures of speech employed include metaphors, simile, personification, euphemism and allusion. Metaphor, in its case, is a means of representing one aspect of experience in terms of another. It is by no means restricted to poetry but any aspect of experience can be represented in terms of any number of metaphors (Fairclough 1989:99) Metaphors have ideological significance and they give off the feminist ideology of the writer in the following examples:

- 8a We are the **earth** itself. (Osofisan 1982:67f.)
- b You must be **godhead** itself. (Osofisan 1982: 33f.)
- c You are **Moremi**. (Osofisan 1982: 60f.)

Through the use of nominal, available in the set of examples above, are equated with elements that have depth. For example, the earth is the planet that supports survival. It is the habitation of all animals and mankind. Every mortal activity transpires upon the face of the earth and without the earth, there possibly would not be anything like humanity. The earth is significant to existence, procreation, fertility and productivity. It is grand enough to accommodate everyone. The writer equates women with the earth. This means that they are not minorities as patriarchal forces will want to insinuate. In the second metaphor, Moremi is equated with the supernatural (godhead). This again supports the unshakeable spirit of womanhood and their ability to do great things. Titubi is described as Moremi, the legend because of her ability to save her people just like Moremi saved her race in her days. In each of these cases, there is a direct comparison of the women with significant things and people. This shows the writer's interest in women as against the men. While the women get commendations from the writer, he equates the male characters with non-living objects as we have in the following metaphor:

- 9 (The Igbos) turn my bravest warriors (Men) into helpless Omolangidi.
(Osofisan 1982: 36f.)

It is important to note that the categories of men being referred to in 9 above are the best in the set. They are the "bravest" yet they are turned to nonentities *omolangidi*. The author's attempt at portraying the men as gruesome also finds expression in the use of Igbo men who became a threat to the peaceful existence of the entire Ife race. This is different from the picture presented about the woman.

Similes are also used in expressing direct comparison through the use of *as* and *like*. Although metaphor and simile are used in expressing comparison, it is only in similes that we use *as* and *like*. In the following examples, similes are used to give off the writer's feminist ideology:

- 10a Your courage is strong like our ancient rafters. (Osofisan 1982: 36f.)
- b I went and returned triumphant like a legend. (Osofisan 1982: 60f.)
- c Let the women come and we shall dance together like the procession on a bridal night.
(Osofisan 1982: 34f.)
- d Offspring of Abiodun, audacious sculptor who makes songs of bronze and brass as easily as making stew.
(Osofisan 1995: 42f.)
- e A certain river, people from the town must not go there, but Tegonni went there and splashed her face, my arms and feet, they became elegant as a gazelle's.
(Osofisan 1995: 37f.)
- f Freedom is like an appetite, it is never totally silenced. And we all possess it, a gnawing ant in the belly of our souls .
(Osofisan 1993: 54f.)

In (10a) Moremi's courage is compared to that of an ancient rafter. A rafter refers to a beam that holds the roof of a house. Without the rafter, the roof cannot stand well on the building and without a roof, the house cannot be inhabited. By comparing her with the rafter, the writer portrays the woman as an important part of the building (Nigerian society). She holds the roof of the structure and without her, the nation is not complete. The popular belief is that many old products are usually more durable and qualitative than what we have in the modern day when there are so many sub-standard and adulterated products. The writer does not equate the woman with any kind of rafter but with the ancient rafter which is strong and has stood the test of time. With the ancient rafter, the roof cannot be easily blown off by winds. In (10b) the writer compares Titubi (the woman) with a legend, one who cannot fail in her duties, one who cannot die in the face of challenges, one whose memories will linger on for a long time even after she might have passed away. Bridal night is usually a social event that is associated with life and excitement. Hence, Ayoka equates the women's dance with the scene of a bridal night suggesting their ability (and by extension, the woman's ability) to spark life and bring excitement to the community. The woman is a professional success. Even though she sometimes finds some tasks to be challenging; she easily devises means of dismantling them. In 10d, Tegonni is presented as the character who opts for a male dominated profession and does it easily as if it is a woman's job (making stew). In (10e) the woman (Tegonni) does the unusual and she excels like a gazelle. This is similar to the situation that we have in (10d). In 10f, Ayoka, another female character stresses that freedom is like an appetite. This means that the freedom of the female gender cannot be negotiated. The clamour for gender equality must continue. The writer is of the opinion that people who blame women for being ambitious should keep mute because freedom is like an appetite which everybody likes. Conversely, the men are compared to weaklings as in this simile:

- 11 The men's vaunted charms now impotent like *Osanyin* left in the rain
(Osofisan 1982: 36f.)

The nearest interpretation that could be given to the writer's meaning of *Osanyin* is a toothless bulldog. It is manly and brave but is incapacitated. This is a negative picture of manhood.

Allusions are also used in the texts. References are made to women who are believed to have existed whether in real life or as a myth.

- 12a Go on Titu, the magnificent Moremi of the sixties! Make your show, let them clap for you.
(Osofisan 1982: 14f.)
- b And so, am I from the Greek and other mythologies Antigone belongs to several incarnations.
We are metaphors. We always come in the colour and the shape of your imagination.
(Osofisan 1995: 26f.)
- c The kind of songs we have never had in our land since the days of our mother, Efunsetan of Ibadan.
(Osofisan 1993:19f.)

All the allusions made in the excerpts above are made to women believed to have done exploits in various capacities within Nigeria and beyond. These are no ordinary or useless women but women who were believed to have moved and shaken their societies in their days; women who contributed positively and made lasting impacts in their society. These include Moremi of Ile-Ife and EfunsetanAniwura, the powerful Iyalode of Ibadan who wielded more power than the king of her time. Antigone in the Greek mythology is also renowned for her exploits. In spite of the several reference to women, none is made to men. This is to bring out the writer's bias for feminism. At least, some men too have done well in history but the writer does not take cognizance of them.

Personification is another figure of speech used by the writer to depict his feminist ideology. Personification, in the arts, is the act of representing a thing or idea as a person. The following example of the deployment of personification:

- 13 And he looked at me (Tegonni) and said, come I have come to claim you, my lantern.
(Osofisan 1995: 37f.)

One, lantern is personified in this excerpt. Tegonni is equated to or represented with a lantern. Other expressions such as: I have come to claim you, my wife or my lover would have been plausible, but the writer showcases his creativity by using a non-living object to represent the woman. Importantly, he does not merely compare the woman with any kind of non-living thing but with a lantern. A lantern has positive connotations because it is associated with light. Light dominates over darkness. By saying the woman is a lantern means she is naturally endowed with all that is needed to bring light to a hitherto dark society. The use of such a word also suggests the woman's ability to add value to the life of the man. The deployment of the rhetorical device adds to the instantiation of the writer's feminist ideology.

Fairclough (1989) identifies euphemism as one of the figurative expressions that can be used in explicating ideology in CDA. Euphemism refers to a situation whereby an unpleasant subject is presented in a mild way to make it look less weighty. For example, it is commonplace to have a euphemistic expression such as: he has passed away for someone who has died. The former superficially looks milder than the latter even though they have the same deeper meaning. We do not have so many euphemistic expressions in the texts. However, the following is one major example:

- 14 The Igbos are drawing near, combing the streets and alleys, scaling our walls with ease. And you know what is happening as our story repeats itself... Moremi is prepared to stake her life, to take the risk of captivity in order to be able at last to penetrate into the enemy camp

and learn their magic. What do you say, husband? Shall I stay behind and forsake all this so that this evening you can come and tickle **my tender parts**?

(Osofisan 1982: 37f.)

The use of ‘tender parts’ at a level suggests the delicateness, gracefulness and fragility associated with the female gender. These are encouraging adjectives. On another level, going by the urgency and seriousness of the issue at stake, it is expected that the writer has to avoid the use of the more direct sexual intercourse but rather opts for tickling the woman’s tender parts. Moremi believes that when the nation is in distress, sexual desires must be made to wait till later. Ditto for the writer who believes that women are not only good as sex objects. They have not been created to give sexual pleasures alone and they should not leave what should be done alone just because they want to enjoy themselves. The writer also believes that the woman should not allow herself to be manipulated or tricked out of doing the necessary things on time by their husbands or any other person. Womanhood, and by implication, feminism is beyond sexual satisfaction, it is about responsibility.

4.3 Feminist ideology: women as expressive and dynamic

The underlying feminist ideology in the selected drama texts for this study revolves around the woman’s expressiveness and dynamism. The woman is portrayed as one who can express her thoughts through whatever means when they are given the ample opportunity to do so. Even though in the traditional African society, men stand a better chance of using proverbs, because most times, they are heads of families and clans, it does not mean that women cannot adequately deploy this element to express issues bordering about her gender liberation. Women cannot be silenced. They are also dynamic. They are lanterns. They bring a positive change when they are allowed to express their femininity. Lantern dispels darkness. The author thinks women need moral support from their male counterparts. Hence, it is a man who refers to his wife as ‘my lantern’. This is to say that without the woman, the man might possibly remain in darkness. The loss of the woman’s virginity also depends largely on a male effort, aside any form of sexual perversion. This underscores the role of men or the need for the men to assist the female gender in their effort towards achieving self-actualisation and the liberation of their gender.

5 Conclusion

This study has focused on the deployment of proverbs and figurative expressions in expressing the feminist nuances in Femi Osofisan’s *Morountodun*, *YungbaYungba* and *the dance contest* and *Tegonni: an African Antigone*. The analysis reveals that the playwright used proverbs, metaphors, similes, personification, allusion and euphemism to project women as having many parts; they are powerful, strong, delicate and dynamic. The various linguistic categories such as nouns, pronouns, verb and lexical collocations are used to instantiate the playwright’s strong belief in women’s capabilities. These features also inherently reveal the manifestation of the overriding feminist ideology, which is women as expressive and dynamic, in the plays. The writer identifies the male gender as having important roles to play in the actualization of gender equality. The study shows that language has great implications on gender studies and that proverbs and figurative expressions could be deployed by authors to instantiate feminist ideology.

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