

## Wedding and Oil Money Metaphors in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* and J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, Respectively

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### Abstract

The introductory part of the study reveals the intention of Olu Obafemi and J. P. Clark in their *Naira Has No Gender* and *The Wives' Revolt* respectively which is for the reformation of their society for a good social order. It also points out the choice of metaphor which occurs within the purview of literary stylistics as the theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the two plays. The analysis of Christian wedding as a metaphor in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* is based on a number of sample passages from the play. These are passages on insensitivity of the ruling class, unequal culture, dysfunctional social, economic, and political systems in Nigeria. Similarly, from J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, passages that criticize injustice and corrupt practices prevalent in the polity are extracted. The analysis of the two plays reveals that metaphor is the use of one situation to explain the other. Secondly, the two plays indicate the need for a change of social, economic, and political systems in Nigeria. Thirdly, metaphor is a stylistic device that introduces artistic flavor in a literary work.

### Introduction

Literature is concerned with good social order. It goes beyond entertainment, striving to build a better society for all to live in happily. This is probably why Shelly saw poets (writers) as the unacknowledged legislators of the world (qtd. in Pearson, <https://doi.org/10-1093/acprof:050/97801987>). An experience with renowned writers and their works, is gravitation towards a better society, hence writers create an ideal or utopian society in their literary works. Furthermore, the anomalies in our daily business of governance, commerce, love affairs, etc. have influenced writers to use their works to denounce these abnormalities. This, they do, sometimes using the instruments of satire. Both Olu Obafemi and J. P. Clark are concerned with the well-being of their society. The anomie they have seen in their society trigger off the writing of their plays to reform the society for growth and prosperity.

Metaphor is an element of style. It is a vehicle of imagery. As a vehicle of imagery like simile, antonomasia, and hyperbole, it is used to create pictures for the mind's eye to see; the ear to hear; the hand to touch; the body to feel; the nose to smell and the tongue to taste. Imagery evokes visual, auditory, tactile, thermal, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetics sense qualities. An image is a powerful device for description. As an image and a literary device, metaphor provides the framework for interpretation of Christian wedding in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* and the sharing of oil money in J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*. In this study, the analyst will rely on the evocative capacity of metaphor for the interpretation of these two plays. According to Ogunsiyi, imagery is any writing "which is descriptive, and helps the reader to visualize a scene and so to experience the poet's experience" (72). Traditionally, and like other figures of speech in literature, metaphor is linked to poetry but the application cuts across other genres of literature: prose and drama including everyday use of language. In the two plays

under study, metaphor is used to describe dysfunctional social, political, and economic systems that require a change. The malfunctioning of these systems is due to bad leadership.

Traditionally as well, and as we shall see shortly in the definitions, metaphor is for comparison of two similar and dissimilar things, creatures, experiences, situations, etc. It should be stressed that this comparison is for descriptive purpose, to evoke a scene for comprehension through the human sense organs. Use of metaphor in a literary work gives the work its desired literariness. The artistic quality inherent in metaphor makes it appealing and therefore, its versatility.

As a vehicle of satire, metaphor is pivotal to writers in their quest to pass their messages across successfully and give them a literary flavor for an impact on their audience. As observed by Jolayemi, “The goal of every purposeful writer is to communicate effectively. In order to do this, a metaphorical use of language becomes inevitable because some metaphors help to translate abstract ideas into concrete and tangible terms” (236). Because of the ability to illustrate and create a vivid scene that appeals to the mind’s eye, etc. metaphor has become a powerful device employed by writers. Obafemi and Clark see literature as an agent of change and metaphor as an instrument for the realization of the desired change which is possible through their dramatic works. The desired change is needed in Nigeria for social inclusion because of pervasive dysfunctional social, economic, and political systems. In the author’s note in the play, *Naira Has No Gender*, Obafemi says: “I have chosen an ostensibly trivial part-domestic, part social issue in this play to examine how conscious (socially and politically) individuals confront the reality of daily existence in a bankrupt, cynical and dysfunctional social order” (5). The analysis of metaphor in the play is focused on dysfunctional social order. From the portrayal of poor socio-economic condition in the country to bad political system, we see the need for a change. The system enriches the rich while the poor are getting poorer, therefore, no social inclusion. The concern of both Obafemi and Clark is good governance, thus, the need for reorientation of social, economic, and political systems for social inclusion.

For a better understanding and appreciation of the term, metaphor, some definitions are necessary. Moody defines it as “the descriptive application of qualities from one thing to another” (20). This definition can drive the analysis of a text. And it will guide in the analysis of Christian wedding metaphor in Olu Obafemi’s *Naira Has No Gender* and oil money metaphor in J. P. Clark’s *The Wives’ Revolt*. As for Cuddon, metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is compared implicitly with another (10). As the analysis of the two plays will reveal, white wedding in *Naira Has No Gender* goes beyond physical celebration and a contract between man and woman. Metaphorically, it is a criticism of bad socio-economic situation due to bad political system. Similarly, the oil money in *The Wives’ Revolt* is beyond sharing of money meant as compensation in an oil rich Erhuwarun community to illustrate injustice and corruption.

However, notwithstanding the usefulness of Moody’s and Cuddon’s definitions to the analysis of metaphor in this study, they are still considered pedestrian in the opinion of the present researcher and as far as the present study is concerned. The applicability of metaphor coupled with its function as a device for effective communication make these two definitions inadequate. The analysis of the deployment of metaphor that will be carried out in this study does not limit it (metaphor) to application of qualities, or transfer of the qualities of one thing

to the other because of their similarity on one hand and the difference on the other. As a framework for textual analysis, the perspective that is maintained in this study is that metaphor is the use of one situation to explain the other for illustrative purpose. The two situations may be similar in one respect and dissimilar in another.

Furthermore, comparison is the traditional role of metaphor but it is not an end in itself: it is a means to an end. Metaphor does not occur as a figure of speech only for aesthetic effect. As an element of style, metaphor is a vehicle for effective transmission of the writers' messages. Therefore, it is not introduced into a literary text (especially, African literary works) for the purpose of art for art's sake. An analysis of a literary work is the interpretation of the events and characters portrayed in the work to make the message of the writer understood by their audience. In this study, the interpretation of the events in Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* and Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* will be done using metaphor as a framework for a better appreciation of these plays by the audience.

Nevertheless, by the classification of metaphor as a figure of speech, Moody and Cuddon's definitions fall in line with the principles of literary stylistics. Literary stylistics, as stated by Ogunsiiji focuses on the figurative and evocative use of language. It believes in skillful and artistic use of language. It is not concerned with objective description of features of language but their stylistic effect and functions in message transmission (27). As stated earlier, the analysis of metaphor in Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* and Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* will be from the perspective of the evocative power of metaphor. Furthermore, the effect and functions of style are considered as an impetus to drive the analysis of the two plays under study. One of the goals of literary stylistics is interpretation of the message of the literary text. In this study, the analysis of metaphor will reveal the authors' message which is failure of leadership in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, good governance appears to be a mirage due to so many factors. The concern over this has given rise to a number of articles that are churned out by a good number of authors and critics of government policies. Yakubu has noted that

African literature is generally protest bound. This is why its analysis could not be properly done under art for art's sake philosophy. African writers are social crusaders. They have used their literary works to express their concern over bad governance in their various societies (77).

In line with this, Odion has opined that "nowadays, drama, apart from being didactic has now become a tool for social advocate" (56). Literature is an agent of change, and this is what both Olu Obafemi and J. P. Clark want to achieve through their plays under study.

Failure of leadership in many African countries has made the quest for good governance a subject of everyday discourse. According to Eregha,

Nigeria became self-governing since October, 1960. Since that time, the state has failed to provide good governance. This is reflected in the poverty situation and hopelessness in the state. Although the state is very rich, the abundant wealth has not been properly managed to the benefit of all (79).

This position corroborates the findings of this study.

The major factor that has been identified by many analysts and critics and which has been accepted by all as the bane of the Nigerian society is corruption. An ex-president of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo is quoted to have said:

As we all know, corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten into the fabric of our society at every level. It has caused decay and dereliction within the infrastructure of government and the society in physical, social and human terms. Corruption has been responsible for the instability of successive governments since the First Republic. Every coup since then has been in the name of stamping out the disease called corruption. Unfortunately, the cure often turned out to be worse than the disease. And Nigeria has been the worse off. Nigeria's external image took a serious bashing as our beloved country began to feature on top of every corruption index (qtd. in Usman, 237-238).

The sincerity in the tone of the above passage is a justification for the establishment of anti-corruption agencies by the Obasanjo administration during his first term in office as an elected civilian president. As patriotic citizens, Olu Obafemi and J. P. Clark have used their plays: *Naira Has No Gender* and *The Wives Revolt*, respectively, to join in the fight against corruption and bad governance in Nigeria. The rot in the Nigerian political system is stupendous. Ayoola notes:

Public office serves some Nigerians as opportunity to loot the treasury and accumulate massive wealth which are (sic) laundered. Some Nigerians who have served as councilors, local government chairmen, commissioners, governors, ministers, senators, and representatives, etc. have acquired huge and immeasurable wealth not in any way commensurate with their position and legitimate income (7).

In Nigeria, those who seek elective offices, and have been given the mandate to rule see their offices as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement at the detriment of the electorate. The situation presented above is bad and presents an uncivilized form of behavior, therefore, the need for a change. Many African literary works are a clarion call for a complete reorientation of values and attitude, social, economic, and political systems in the continent. The plays of Olu Obafemi and J. P. Clark under study are awakening the consciousness towards change of the dysfunctional systems in Nigeria.

### **Wedding Metaphor in Olu Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender***

Olu Obafemi has used the love affair between Otunla and Aina, the two major characters in the play, to reveal the bad socio-economic condition in Nigeria caused by a bad political system. Nigeria is a country of unequal culture and unequal opportunity, therefore the classes of the haves and the have-nots. In the play, Christian wedding as a metaphor is an illustration of hardship, oppression and deprivation due to unequal culture. The idea of Christian wedding is

a metaphor of insensitivity of the propertied class, waste, hardship, and dysfunctional social, economic, and political systems. Dokun and Bebbey's wedding is reported as follows:

I was present at his own wedding .... Everything immaculate white; flower flakes, white; champagne, white; Baby Benz wedding car, white; the sport Mustang car which his father gave them as a wedding present, spotless-white. I hear the mansion his father gave them for their honeymoon ... I hear it is painted white (14-15).

The above scene is a display of unnecessary luxury and lavish culture and it is happening in a society where many are poor and are unable to feed even once in a day. Underlying the white wedding description is the dramatist's criticism of unequal culture where the rich have built an island of affluence in the ocean of poverty. The waste and extravagance that are associated with Christian wedding make the dramatist to condemn such a wedding.

*Vis-à-vis* the enactment of the Christian wedding story is the dramatization of the socio-economic situation of the country. Otunla says:

I am talking of semovita, essential commodities, staple food items like rice, yams, garri .... Have you forgotten the forbidden price of a kilo of beef, even pork and frozen fish, *Oku Eko*? ... And by the way, shall we have babies? ... Shall those babies require food; Nan, Similac, Cerelac? (13).

The juxtaposition of the poor economic situation with lavish Christian wedding is to comment on and condemn the insensitivity of the privileged class. The rich control the economy of the nation which is in shambles because of poor management and policy summersault. They loot the nation's treasury and live expensive life style. Their greed and primitive accumulation of wealth have created poverty and hardship in the land. As a metaphor, the wedding story, *vis-à-vis* the economic situation, is to illustrate the insensitivity of the upper class people, hardship and poverty as a result of dysfunctional economic and political systems.

Otunla and Aina cannot afford white wedding because they are poor. The prices of the items required are beyond their reach because of poor income and poor background. This stresses the existence of unequal culture which the play criticizes. The list of the items for Christian wedding as we hear from Aina is as follows:

Have I mentioned the gown, the wedding ring? ... The attires of the bridal team, the ring bearer, the flower girls... The group uniforms, *Aso ebi* down the twenty-one lineages that form my ancestry? (12).

The absurdity that the above items seem to mean is because of the prevalent hardship. The poor have no guarantee for food. Man's basic need has become a luxury. The rich are interested in keeping the gulf between the two divides wider and therefore the political system is built on rigging of the election to perpetuate the dysfunctional system.

Customary wedding on the other hand suggests revolutionization, change of attitude, and reorientation of social, economic and political systems. It is the need for change that informs

Aina and Otunla's rejection of the offer from Dokun and Debby to sponsor their white wedding. The rejection is quite significant. It is a paradigm shift from waste culture to prudent culture. Otunla and Aina opt for simple customary wedding. Aina: "...takes the two bead necklaces, as she passes one to Otunla... Debby: she holds Aina's hand and helps her to slip the bead necklace on Otunla's neck" (51).

It is this simple customary wedding rite that Dokun says: "will be blessed with products of our future hope .... When the craze for wealth has turned us all into beasts...." (51). In the rat race for wealth, Nigerians can do anything for money to climb up the social hierarchy. In the play, the woman drug trafficker who loads her baby's nappies with cocaine but escapes arrest at the immigration check point at the Heathrow Airport is going abroad to sell the hard drugs and in return "buy loads of wedding outfits; garments, jewels, rings, flowers, shoes, cokes, ..." (55). The enactment of this story is to associate Christian wedding with moral decadence, therefore its rejection. White wedding contributes to social dysfunction, therefore, the need for change of attitude.

The union between Otunla and Aina which is contracted through simple customary wedding rite is to usher in hope: it is to "bring the birth of a new dream for the land" (57). This wedding will right the wrongs in the country. It stands for revolution and reorientation of social, economic, and political systems. The union is expected to change the present dysfunctional systems for a good social order.

By and large, the juxtaposition of Christian wedding and customary wedding stories is to illustrate waste, insensitivity of the ruling class, unequal culture, hardship, deprivation, retrogression, dysfunctional social, economic, and political systems on one hand and modesty, dynamism, progress, prosperity, and social, economic, and political reorientation on the other hand. As a metaphor, the wedding story is an enactment of the need to change for a better society.

### **Oil Money Metaphor in J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt***

*The Wives' Revolt* by J. P. Clark is a criticism of corruption and social injustice. It is a play that advocates equity and fairness in the socio-political affairs of an oil-rich Erhuwaren community for social inclusion. As a metaphor, the story of the sharing of oil money meant as compensation is an enactment of injustice and corruption in Nigeria resulting in social exclusion. The story illustrates greed and bad leadership. The drama is not just about Erhuwaren women and their husbands, but corruption and maladministration in Nigeria. As a lampoon, the story calls for a change in the socio-economic and political systems in Nigeria. We see in the play that:

It is the matter of oil money sent by the oil company operating on our land. The amount is known to all. This sum, after due debate in the town hall, has been shared out in three equal parts, one going to the elders of the town, the second to the men in all their age groups, and the third by no means the least, to the women, also in all their age grades. A most fair and equitable settlement you will never find in any other society; near or far (1).

From whichever angle that one looks at the above method of sharing, it is an injustice against women which reveals bad leadership in the land. There is no fair play in the sharing formula, therefore, the revolt. The protest is for corrective purpose. The playwright is suggesting for a reorientation of social and political systems as well as a change of attitude.

The injustice against women is accentuated as they are accused of witchcraft practice by transforming into goats to terrorize their husbands. This is an allegation leveled against women in order to persecute and disposes them of their goats as they are the goat rearers. A law is enacted that:

It shall become an offence for any citizen of Erhuwaren, whether male or female, adult or child, to own a goat, whether as individuals or bodies corporate, for whatever reasons, be they domestic, commercial, or even religious in character. Accordingly, all good citizens, now in possession of the above-mentioned creature, shall as from the time of the announcement, take all due steps to remove their holdings, be it one head, an entire herd or any group in-between, far from the confines and precincts (sic) of our beloved town. Failure to do so will attract the penalty of immediate forfeiture of the animals in whatever numbers to the community at large... (2).

This is an obnoxious law that is targeted against women. Men actually carry out this threat at down the following day as they begin to impound goats and slaughter them for a feast. This is an abuse of power by men. They are at the helm of affairs and they decide the fate of Erhuwaren community. This injustice angers women who have decided to abandon their responsibilities and embark on a trek to Eyara. This is a way of getting back at their husbands as Eyara is an enemy village. Metaphorically, the action of the women can be explained as a fight against injustice and corrupt practices.

The plight of women in an unjust political system is further revealed by Koko as follows:

Now, if you are looking for a creature other than man in this town that causes havoc physically and immediately, you people really should have done better than pick upon the goat. But oh no, all you want to do is get on top of us women. There you have your pigs prowling all over the place unmolested, but because you hold the swine in common trust and sell it at inflated price to Ughelli people at times of their festival, while goats are household animals kept by us women, you protect one animal and expel the other out of town (8).

This is discrimination which should be stopped. The passage reveals a corrupt political system. Despite the destruction done by pigs to women's farms by digging up their cassava tubers and up-rooting the yams before they mature for harvest, they are still protected by the unjust and corrupt political system headed by men. The women's rejection of the political system manifests in their revolt. The revolt is effective as their grievances have been addressed. The obnoxious law is repealed and the remaining oil money will be used to build schools. The wives

in the play have triumphed over their men. They have been compensated at public expense. Their revolt is a message to all the oppressed to say no to their oppression by any group of people in society. Their victory as portrayed in the play is a victory for the Nigerian masses but in reality it is not yet *Uhuru* as projected at the resolution of the plot of the story. The victory is to initiate a struggle against oppression and deprivation. As we can see in the play that:

As for the original matter of the oil company money that started all this fire, let it be known here and now that it was not such a big sum of money anyway. Certainly, not so big that it was going to change the condition of our lives permanently for better. It has left the poor poorer, and the rich perhaps a little richer as our oil continues to flow to enrich other people across the country. But that is another story (59-60).

From the above passage, we can see that the struggle continues. Like the end of a performance in an epic theatre, the audience is left to ponder how to stop the flow of oil from the Niger Delta to enrich a few persons. This is the situation that the play is largely addressing: so much of corruption and injustice in the oil industry, the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Corruption has crippled the industry and has affected development in Nigeria.

The discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta came with unimaginable level of corruption. Corruption in the oil sector, fuelled by poor governance has made an indolent group of people with connections stinking rich without working. Over the years, the activities of Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC, later, NNPCCL) are shrouded in opacity with corrupt individuals making more money than the government. The NNPCCL cannot account for the number of barrels of crude oil that is produced daily. Furthermore, refineries are gulping billions of dollars yearly on turn around maintenance without refining petroleum products. The NNPCCL which claimed to engage in crude swap with a consortium of oil refineries abroad was still paying huge amount of money to some cartels as subsidy on fuel importation. Former President Muhammadu Buhari provided for the subsidy in the 2023 budget up to the month of June, but to the chagrin of Nigerians, the NNPCCL increased the pump price of premium motor spirit (PMS) upon President B. A. Tinubu's announcement of withdrawal of subsidy during his inaugural address on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2023, thereby making Nigerians pay Shylock prices for subsidized products. This is day light robbery. Nigerian oil industry has become a conduit pipe for siphoning the wealth of the nation. The sharing of oil money as a metaphor is an illustration of corruption and injustice prevalent in the social, economic, and political systems in the country.

Corruption in NNPCCL made Wale Edun, the Minister of Finance and the Chairman, Federal Account Allocation Committee to point out at the FAAC meeting held in March, 2024 that: "Tinubu was committed to ensuring that the forensic audit of NNPC Limited was conducted and the result analysed" (Punch Online). Punch has reported that the Federal Government is set to commence a fresh audit of fuel subsidy claim by the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited, that an audit firm, KPMG had conducted an initial audit reducing the claims from N6 tn to N2.7 tn (Punch Online). The audit is to cover from 2019 to 2021. This gives a glimpse of how oil has enriched a few Nigerians working in the oil sector. This is



dramatized at the resolution of *The Wives' Revolt*. The oil sector which is the Nigerian cash cow is being mismanaged by corrupt leaders.

There is always collaboration between those in government and corrupt NNPC officials to loot the national treasury. Ude reports:

The trio of former Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Abubakar Malami, Mamman Daura and a personal assistant to former president Muhammadu Buhari, Saibu Yusuf aka Tunde, are using British lawyer to negotiate with the Bola Tinubu's Government for the return of \$25 billion from a \$75 billion they allegedly looted from oil deal (Daily Monitor.com.ng).

This is a primitive desire for wealth that is made possible by the kind of political system that we operate in Nigeria. It is the reason for poverty and therefore, the need for change for development. All these have been expressed in strong terms by J. P. Clark in *The Wives' Revolt*.

### **Conclusion and Summary of Findings**

Metaphor is a literary method of using one situation to explain the other. This is for artistic and clarity purposes. Like its traditional role of comparison, the two situations may be similar or dissimilar. But then, one situation dovetails with the other and goes beyond introducing a literary quality to present an impressive view of a scene, idea, situation, etc. for a better understanding and appreciation by the audience. Metaphor contributes to the literariness of a literary work. It is a powerful device employed for description.

In Obafemi's *Naira Has No Gender* and Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, beyond the wedding story and the sharing of oil money respectively, is the condemnation of bad leadership, insensitivity of the ruling class, abysmal socio-economic and political systems, corruption, and injustice. The two plays portray the need for social, economic, and political reorientation. This study brings to the fore, one of the roles of African writers which Achebe said is "to tackle the big subjects of the day – imperialism, slavery, independence, gender, racism, etc. (54).

In *Naira Has No Gender*, Obafemi has confronted the issue of poor governance that results in bad economic policy which has impoverished the people. Furthermore, the play makes a strong statement against the country's political system. All these are to suggest the need for a change of behaviour for the well-being of society. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* as well is a scathing denunciation of injustice and corruption in Nigeria. It is an enactment of failure of leadership due to corruption and in justice with a suggestion for a change for good leadership and social inclusion.

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