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**The Rural Woman as an Architect of Nation-Building: From the Spectrum of
Tess Osonye Onwueme in *What Mama Said* and Bole Butake in *Lake God***



Manjo Gladys Bimeh

University of Yaounde 1

Department of African Literature and Civilisation

Email: mgladysbimeh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses Onwueme's What Mama Said and Butake's Lake God to highlight the role of the African rural woman in the political, social, economic and cultural advancement of the society. She serves as a conscientiser in the struggle against patriarchy in contemporary African society. Her sense of community engagement and commitment to societal growth make her a veritable partner in nation-building. In these plays, the playwrights expose and criticize the irresponsible political governance in Africa and reveal that violence can be used for curative purpose, especially in the face of social injustice from an oppressive system. The analysis of these works is informed by

tenets of black feminist discourse with focus on the African feminism that seeks to expatiate on the various ranges of womanhood and her bearing of indigenous knowledge. The argument is that the African womanist vision is a redefinition of the new African rural woman, who is assertive and active in nation building as a companion to her male counterpart. In a nutshell, the works of Onwueme and Butake are interpreted from the backdrop of radical political and social commitment since postcolonial writers are not only interested in the stylistic correctness of their works but also in their functionality.

KEY WORDS

Rural Woman, Architect, Nation-Building, African womanist, African feminism

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

Views about African rural women have not only been the subject of many literary discourse but have also been the source of many controversy. These views have largely focused on the ways that gender and its inequality have shaped and have been shaped by our cultural and social systems. The behavior and signifying role of women in various societies and the critical question of the empowerment of rural women within the social structure as Wilfred Cartey's *Whispers from a Continent* (1969) mythologizes motherhood as seen in its usage of mother as symbol for Africa. Using Chinua Achebe's novels as one case study, phanuel Akabueze Egejurn (1997), on his part, addressed the question of the female principle in the African Cosmology and the dichotomy between the workings of this principle and the actual treatment of rural women, particularly those in Cameroon and Nigerian societies. The behavior and role of rural women in most societies have informed the world of literary discourse seen through the works of writers like Kenneth Little (1980), Emmanuel Obiechina (1997), Marion Kilson (1970) to name a few. Shadrach Ambanasom (2003) focused on the question of the empowerment of rural women within the social structure. Cameroonian and Nigerian birth and nuptial songs have enabled Alembong (2011) to look at the woman from the perspective of her femininity, or what Egejurn (1997, P.11) terms 'woman being', a being that is both biological and socially constructed.

The perspective from which many scholars have viewed the New African woman have not only been largely based on sample texts in written African literature to a near neglect of typical African rural woman; the critical focus has generally tended to emphasize her role in the society and not so much her sense of community engagement and her contribution to nation building, qualities which make her a reliable partner in the construction of the nation. Hence, the choice of this subject and the corpus for this paper is meant to fill the gap.

The main conviction of our discussion, therefore, is the strategies through Onwueme and Butake's theatres present the rural woman in her social role in the Cameroonian and Nigerian societies respectively, a role that make her and active participant in the developmental drive of both nations and not just an secondary staff. The rural woman use their highly knowledgeable skills to create awareness to state holders, bring justice and peace in the society through their actions as seen in the plays. Their involvement or engagement to ameliorate the wrong happenings in the society to improve on the wellbeing of the nation as a whole. In the regards, attention shall be paid on the rural woman in Onwueme's play *What Mama Said* and Butake's play *Lake God*, her role as a teacher, peace maker, promoter of a collective effort for a positive change in her community, promoter of law and order for the purpose of the development of the society. Terry Lovell (1996) contends that, women's studies and cultural have develop as interdisciplinary studies, the more reason why a study like this one on the African rural woman as an appropriates concepts for nation building.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical frame work that is suitable for our study of the rural woman is African feminism which is credited to Simon de Beauvoir and black feminists discourse with focus on the African feminism that seeks to expatiate on the various ranges of womanhood and her bearing of indigenous knowledge. Clenora Hudson-Weems defines feminism as a political movement that works to gain social equality and rights; it is some times called women's liberation movement or women rights movement. She postulate the fact that feminism is a western philosophy for according to her is embarrassing for it is imported from the west to ruin the nice Africa women and to destroy African homes. There are different types of feminist schools of thought; we have Liberal feminism, Socialist feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, postmodern feminism and Psychoanalytical feminism, Africana womanism and Black Feminism. Our discussion focuses on Africana-Womanism, African feminism and Eco-feminism. These are viewed from the perspectives of theories of Clenora Hudson- Weems who is an Africana womanist, adding those of Patricia Hill Collins, Angella Davis and Bell Hooks, who are Black feminists. De Beauvoir's work, *The second Sex*, remains a major school of thought in feminist discourse. She sees the woman as lacking in her own history, and argues that the women are not born as objects for men. She gives the go ahead to women to work hard and come out from their comfort zones and resist the "other" space that men have put her into since the creation of man.

Clenora Hudson-Weems developed the concept of *Africana Womanism*, "an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent". Alice Walker sought to distinguish African American women's commitment to women's issues of the feminism of white women. According to Walker in *In Search of our Mothers Garden*, "Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender". She assumes a common framework and foundation for feminism and womanism. Walker goes into nature and compares it with colours that exist between Feminist and Womanist. She contrasts the pale lavender with a much darker purple. All the women share the same view for they believe they can better analyze their experiences from a black woman's perspective than their white counterpart. The African feminist approach is used because the texts in question evoke issues of the African woman. In this regard, African female writers have readily embraced the definition of Africana Womanism offered by Weems in her book, *Africana Womanism* (1993). She maintains that:

Africana Womanism is not Black Feminism,[...] African womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women.(24).

The multi-cultural, multiracial and multi class interpretation of feminism makes the discipline multidisciplinary as it insists on connecting African literature and other art forms to the diversity of life and more so, the experiences and situation of African women in general and rural women in particular. This criticism focuses on the way rural women are depicted in literature, the patriarchal ideology implicit in literary works, and the traditions, customs and attitudes supporting systematic male domination that are inscribed in the literary canon. This feminist approach is very relevant to the study of rural women in Butake and Onwueme plays in question in three ways. First, it helps to terminate the prejudices men and their norms in the

patriarchal society hold on women. Also, it is aimed at valuing women in general and rural women in particular. lastly, it re-examines the political, social, economic, tradition, cultural and psychological contexts of the narratives of the playwrights under study and the space women occupy the communities concerned.

Women as Nation Builders

Rural women play a vital role in nation building which African playwrights strive to represent in their plays. The manifestation of the rural women in the development of the nation by women in African drama is often reflected in themes, structure, style and characters.

Our concern is the manifestation of the African culture and tradition through the rural female characters. Many critics face difficulties presenting the African culture and tradition through women. The characters are considered as designating and projecting the culture and traditions gearing towards the development of their communities. Thus, Butake and Onwueme have projected the role they play and how they fight to conserve the African culture in its natural form. Onwueme and Butake are of the opinion that, the African women should take what is good from the western world and add to their culture to better up things and turn their backs to what will instead destabilized the African rich culture. Africa has got it unique cultural norms that the rural women want it to move from one generation to another, which is what they advocate for. This ideology is strongly In *Lake God*. The author seeks to decipher the feature of the African culture, tradition and the techniques through which Butake portrays the rural women. As explained by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart*, African culture was already a civilized one. Africa had its own form of commerce, science, art and other measures of civilization long before the arrival of the colonisers. His novel is to present a complex, dynamic society to western audience who perceived African society as primitive and backward. The African culture was intact and was the Garden of Eden or the Mother of Mankind. Africa had autonomous groups with distinct languages and customs before the coming of the European explorers.

The extra female characters in the texts under study are therefore a force to reckon with. *What Mama Said* and *Lake God* on their part, are dramatization of the efforts of their powerful rural women to free themselves from the corrupt and dictatorial rule of their traditional rulers and the representative of the colonial masters. Every action in the plays takes place either in the sacred grove or at the market square respectively. Places we can describe as fantastic setting where all solutions are taken for the proper functioning of the community and the truth of communal existence in the development of their societies. The plays are satirical presentation of actualities in contemporary society. The playwrights present communities where values of rural women are projected. The core of the plays as Andrew T. Ngeh projects in *Folklore and Commitment in Anglophone Cameroonian Poetry*, where he quotes Nol Alembong's view "relates to a repressive system of governance and unrealistic thinking, a system characterized by the misuse or power, injustice, corruption, and wanton greed". (131). The main conflicts in the plays are between the women, and the greedy leaders.

The threatening and the seizure of farmland and destruction of the natural environment by the Fon and the corrupt leaders have pushed the women to fight back. The only hope for a better future in these communities rest on the removal of the Fons and the tyranic rulers from the helm of power for peace and justice to prevail in the society. Aware of this, the women appeal to

their innermost thoughts which through loud voices and actions assist in demolishing the dictatorship of rulers. This paved the way for a new dawn where all the women shall, in the market square, decide on the affairs of the community. Writers use this concept of characterization as critical tools at all levels of analysis to pass across their messages. The authors under study present the new African in African cosmology, seen as originators and sustainers of things in a society that is characterized by avaricious leaders who misrule the people and the natural resources. The rural women in the plays are simultaneously working for the good of the nation. They are presented as all-seeing of all the wrongs in their various communities. The playwright's vision is that we need to resort to the women to pop up with solution to cleanse the societies of the filth resulting from our leaders unjust mannerisms.

The rural women are presented as powerful personalities who are the watchdogs of the society and must be consulted through intermediaries or mediators. In the excerpt below from *Lake God*, the reader feels the active presence of the gods because Tanto addresses them in apostrophes as if they were present. Fon Joseph is a greedy hypocrite who bribes his way onto the throne and uses his position for his selfish ends. His double standards are portrayed in his handling of the crisis in the village. For example, Angela, his first wife, is childless but he refuses to take a second wife to have children and ensure the continuity of his lineage as tradition demands. He does this on the pretext of his religion but in reality, he is a liar, (he owns most of the cattle in the village), he is exploitative, (he obliges Dewa to pay twenty thousands for crops destroyed by the cattle but does not give the money to the women). When Dewa protests and insists that it is the fon's cattle that destroyed the crops and not his, Fon Joseph victimizes him as seen below:

Fon: You go pay all da chop wey you cow don choppam.
Dewa: No bi na ma nyun, Mbe! Na nyun donchoppamcorn.
Fon: Shurup yum up, bloody fool! (to guards) If he opens his mouth again...!
Dewa: If na so Mbe don talkam...
Fon: You go muf two cow fo you nyunputtam fo me nyun. Woman cow wey get leke three year So dat small tam dem get belle. You don hear fine, fine? (*Lake God*, 16-18).

Frustrated by the heartlessness of the Fon and by the inability of their husbands to ensure that these wrongs are corrected, the women decide to mount pressure on their husbands whom they believe would in turn mount pressure on the Fon who succumb at the end.

The land is no longer the land because the Fon has banished Kwifon and given the land to strangers and rearers of cattle and now the women starved their men and forced them to sit up. The significance of the role played by rural women is just to remind us that, literary work lives in the encounter of characters. It is difficult to conceive of a story without characters. George Nyamndi in a paper titled, *The Symbolism of The Cattle in Lake God* asserts that, *Lake God* is about little men grappling with the little circumstances of their existence. (P.29). The play is fired by dramatic realism with experiences etched in a certain number of conflicts. One can, therefore, say that *Lake God* is the story of a village destroyed by a natural catastrophe resulting

from the clan head's refusal to offer sacrifices to the god of the lake. These little circumstances and experiences turn into a conflict between the men and the women and the women have to strategize in order to bring peace in the land. It is only after that that the men wake up from their slumber.

The leader neglects of the Lake God, god of benevolence leads to the quake, and boiling of the lake, which culminates in the disaster that destroys the land. *Lake God*, as one may say, presents a society in conflict, a conflict between indigenous African values. Butake's attitude towards the concern of rural women is that, the communities can prosper only if men and women dialogue and communion together which is a vital part of African culture and communality. He portrays the place and the importance of women who must be when it comes to decision making for the positive growth of the Nation. Butake and Onwueme stress the necessity of the relationship between both genders and their environment. To them, they are custodians of the society and must work together in nation building. They rightly believe that man is helpless when out of touch with the existence of the naturalness. The community believes that yearly sacrifices to the Lake god ensure peace, regeneration and continuity of the community.

The writers project powerful women who are rioters because they want peace and justice to prevail in the society as American liberators say "If injustice becomes law, Resistance becomes a Duty". This means that, the female characters under study are actively rioting against the system. They are useful and important in the society and need to be listened to, not relegated to the background as before. By presenting these calibers of rural women, Onwueme and Butake seem to suggest that rioting is sometimes necessary to achieve drastic results. Thanks to these women that the masses experience some wind of change in their various communities. As African womanism, all they want is that they live in peace and tranquility and make good use of what is theirs. The women in *Lake God* tell the Fon to lead the people in sacrifice to their *Lake* so that they shall have more children and good harvest. This is to change the situation of the village but the Fon refuses saying that he is a Christian. To the women, the Fon should get what is good from the Christian perspective and stay with their custom and tradition, for they want the generation to come meet it. (P.17).

The women the dramatists present are decision makers, those who say their words and do not go back on them. In *Lake God*, and *What Mama Said*, women are presented as strong willed. They make hard decisions, that is, they decide to starve their husbands because they are doing nothing to solve the issue at stake. The men are dormant in the land, for instance; Langham tells his friends that he has not eaten food for four days, his friends also tell him the same thing. This further angers the women, for instead of the men to check out what is going wrong; they prefer to be quiet. We understand here that of all the decisions made by the women they did not for once go against their own decision. As brave as they are, the women endure and face pain and suffering without fear. In a nutshell, the authors project women who are conscientisers as they create awareness about the ills in the society and they are also committed in their mission to right the wrongs for the nation to move forward which is the ideological visions of our playwrights.

Also, the women are the first people who make the first move to the Fon's palace to complain about Dewa and how his cattle are destroying their crops. This is likening to the Bible where Mary Magdalene was the first to see Jesus after he resurrected. It was at this point in the

history of women that they fully recognized as teachers and leaders in the church. Luke presents us with a number of women at the empty tomb. "The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Mary the mother of James," as well as the unnamed "others who accompanied them" (24:10). Luke records the women's experience clearly enough. The honest women in plays are seen as frank, open and direct in their dealings. In going about the solutions to their problems, they take up a bold step in solving their problems like confronting the Fon and foreign leaders and telling them frankly their wrongs and what they ought to do.

Theatre, Women and Good Governance

Governance is the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority to manage a nation's affair. It is the complex mechanisms, processes, relationships and institutions through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their rights and obligations and mediate their differences. Good governance is therefore a subset of governance, wherein public and natural resources and problems are managed effectively, efficiently and in response to critical needs of the society. Effective democratic forms of governance rely on public participation, accountability and transparency. The playwrights under study present rural women who want the government at all levels in their respective corners to involve these set of women who yearn to add their voices in decision making. They stress on the fact that it must, as a matter of urgency, involve the ordinary people, communities, women, and youths in the platform of development. From their plea, it is very clear that they want the nation to be well governed.

Onwueme and Butake advocate adequate conscientization and sensitization of the people in their communities in particular and the world in general since people protest, revolt and uprising seems to be the only means of effecting change and establishing a society in which justice, fair play and equitable sharing of the commonwealth will prevail. The revolt in the set plays is carried out by women. The authors make them succeed at the end to let the world know that, rural women have a positive say in nation building. Most African countries suffer what great economists refer to as the "resources curse". The symptoms of resources curse are in abundance in our communities that affects the rapid growth of the nation and so it is bound to be the way it is. The countries projected in this study have what it takes for them to be fully developed but ironically it is not.

Education is an important tool for creating change by breaking the silence and expressing support to women. Education offers information that makes women think out of the box and can take action in their own lives. As Mariama Ba (1979) says "education as the practice of freedom" is a process of learning new skills and new dimension of looking at the world. Onwueme shows the educated young girls Imo and Omi in *What Mama Said* who use their knowledge of know how to mobilize the old women to be united and fight as one body to take back what belongs to them. This aspect of educating the women is seen in *What Mama Said* where the girls who have been to school use their know how to galvanize and carry on an uprising led by children, radicalized rural women, a 23-year old former mistress of the foreign oil kingpin, and the educated niece of the corrupt tribal leader. The activists are put on trial for sabotaging oil pipelines and kidnapping the powerful foreign oil representative. The trial attracts international media attention, whereby, the issues of human rights is looked upon, the rights of the people to

the control over their own natural resources and managed it in such a way that everyone should benefit from it.

The problems of rural women in Nigeria and in Cameroon as presented by our dramatists under study are a vast and complex one. This work attempts to link sociopolitical development of rural women in Nigeria and Cameroon to African feminism or womanism as is the case with the rural women in the plays under study. For, if truly feminism implies a female oriented consciousness, then there is no doubt the decades of women's concern for women's issues in Africa is feminist in its direction as presented by Butake and Onwueme in their production under study. In rewriting the history of the rural woman, Onwueme and Butake's approach shifts the traditional responsibility of the fight for political liberation, which has hitherto been the preserve of the men to women. The silent suffering masses come to rely solely on the women who take the leading responsibility for their liberation. This sudden and unexpected resurgence of females on the political field and their overwhelming success is intriguing and new to an audience that has for a very long time diminished and belittled women to subsidiary roles. Our dramatists have discovered that women in traditional societies held admirable political powers, not commensurate with those of their male counterparts when in *Lake God* Shey Bo-Nyo says "There are still men in the land. It might still be saved" (P.23). Tanto's and Shey Bo-Nyo's declarations about resolving crises in their community are impotent as their declarations are issued from a position of weakness. It is the women's Fibuen and its adherents who take up the war song against the Fon. In fact, the stage directions capture this situation vividly:

There is a crowd of women in the village square. After the abortive encounter with the Fon, and because of the fever of the Fibuen, [the women] display a spirit of defiance that would shock their men folk. Something like mob action in which the women have no inhibitions. When action begins, there is the sound of the now familiar horn of Fibuen followed by an exhilarating ululation. . . (P24).

This is immediately followed by the celebration of a victory song led by another woman Yensi which goes thus:

I lack words with which to express my joy. The happiness that is in my heart cannot be shown on my face. The happenings of today have shown that, in spite of what some people say, the ways of the land are alive. We must be one person to succeed in our present undertaking. We must be one woman. Some here have only recently been given into marriage. Their bellies are hot. There are others who cannot control their emotions of love and sympathy. There are still others who will easily succumb to threats and the fear of being beaten. You all know where we have built the sanctuary of the Fibuen. [...] The sanctuary is the refuge for those without a heart. Go there if you cannot look your man in the face and tell him to go eat shit (P.24).

The above song is to prove that the women have succeeded in solving the crisis in the the community and after achieving what they wanted, a song of victory is chanted to prove that, unity is strength. In other areas, they suffer and continue to suffer severe handicaps. Therefore, the rural women understudy in particular and in the world in general hold the key to regaining lost prerogative and creating new, dynamic, and enduring ones for the society. Feminism from

the African perspective will change the woman's sense of herself as an unimportant and secondary figure that walks miles behind her male and highly educated women. A true feminist agenda will help to enfranchise rural women, returning them to powerful policy-making positions and institutions so that their numerical strength will match their contributions to societal advancement.

The main idea behind Onwueme and Butake's vision are that the future lies neither in the suppression of the interests of rural women nor in hostility with men. They evoke this through the women in the plays who say it is peace and justice they want so as to forge ahead for the betterment of the society. The rural women further say, all they want is mutual understanding and respect which are the ideas holding the stories together in Onwueme and Butake's powerful plays under study. The playwrights under study present essentially the same picture of the society as in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* in which she also constructs female gender by an objective representation of the female protagonist thereby making the women relevant in the scheme of things in the society. The above authors register their hatred for male chauvinism and their dissatisfaction with what they consider as an unjust and oppressive system in their respective communities.

Rural women are active agents of economic and social change and environmental protection who are, in many ways and to various degrees, constrained in their roles as farmers, producers, investors, caregivers and food providers for their families. In *Lake God*, Kimbong, Kima'a and Yensi see into it that the land should be appeased so that they have food to feed humanity. They focus on providing more equitable access to conducive environment for all and the next generation by putting an end to the wanton destruction of environment. It is estimated that three out of four poor people in the developing world live in rural areas, and most of them depend directly or indirectly on agriculture for their livelihoods. The rural women in their own little ways are out to see into it the post colonial leaders should not destroy the land in which they do farming, harvest their crops and sell thus boosting the economy of the society. *What Mama Said* is an account of obnoxious practices prevalent in society, which is politically powerful. Onwueme believes in the sensitization of the oppressed and she believes that when sufficiently sensitized, then the oppressed can and must take their own actions to forcefully bring about the transformation in society. Obviously, Onwueme is opposed to the fatalistic view of life seemingly expressed in works like Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not To Blame*. Man is not a pawn in the hands of some beings who eventually dish out good fortune or bad fortune based on his whims and caprices.

The authors under study with their humanists tendencies project women who do ground breaking work for justice, peace and security in their communities. Yet, they continue to be sidelined in formal peace processes. As psychological conflict continues to affect these set of people, urgent action is needed to ensure that rural women and youths are part of peace building, and their contributions are visible and valued. We see this in *What Mama Said* and *Lake God* in which the women have strategized to bring peace in their localities.

This is the transformational work of rural women in peace building and powerful leadership. Rural women's inclusion in nation building processes is essential for long-term success. This is proven in *What Mama Said* in which Gender-equal participation contributes to

longer and lasting peaceful Nation in the sense that, if women are given the full right to take part in decision making; the state of affairs will not be as it is in the contemporary society. Butake and Onwueme are bent on the point that women are softer than men for they are mothers of man kind and have feeling for man more than the men and if they fully take part in nation building, they will somehow be redressing the negative issues that do not favour man in his or her community. That is why they have given the battle of command to the women in their production under study. Despite strong evidence in favour of their inclusion, women remain largely invisible and sidelined from formal peace processes and negotiations. The rural women in the plays under study have waited for the leaders to take action in the preservation of their people and environment to no avail and have decided to do it themselves because sitting and waiting for the man seems a far-fetched issue. Determined as they are, we all see that they become the conquerors in the entire plays under study.

The Beijing Declaration that was held in 1995 was a Platform for Action towards women's issues in general and rural women in particular. It was one of the most comprehensive roadmap towards gender Equity and women's rights. Butake and Onwueme decide to voice out what they think is right in rethinking about this, by uplifting capable rural women to prove their worth. The women in the texts under study are focused and strong-minded to tell the world that they can add their minds to that of men in decisions for a better nation.

The message we get from the plays under study is that, women play instrumental roles in forging and sustaining justice and peace in the society, that is, when they are at the table, they should speak loud about their contributions. Too often, they consider women as vulnerable even in their thoughts which ought not to be judged from this perspective. Failing to acknowledge their crucial work behind the scene mals the proper functioning of state affairs. However, today, the post-colonial feminists like Butake and Onwueme are advocates for women in general and rural women in particular in the formal decision process in their respective communities. As advocates, they fight for spaces in which rural women of diverse backgrounds can sit together and decide how to move forward with the peace agenda. The rural women are leading efforts to push forward, but also asking for more sustainable stability in their communities. They are pushing for political transition towards democracy for a better nation. The determination of the rural women in *What Mama said* makes us hopeful for the future if and only if the leaders let go their ego.

Hadeja in *What Mama Said* Kimbong leaders who lead the people in their respective communities to be aware of the ills in the society. They are determined and at the end they have what they wanted. The women in the texts under study are the first to think and understand the context of the negative happenings in the society; they are innovative. Susan Sebit in one of UN Women conference in South Sudan on the 8 of August 2019 said: "I believe young women's and women inclusion in peace building will create sustainable peace." From this, we get to know how the voiceless and their history are made known to the world so that what they live through never happens to anyone else.

Without rural women rural communities would not function as seen in the texts under study. Butake and Onwueme as post colonial feminists are matching towards the declaration of the United Nation System where UN women argue in *Running the face of Discrimination* that:

Behind the realization of the rights of rural women, in principle and practice. Upholding these rights is essential to international commitments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the environment, and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Fulfilling the promise of the landmark 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where the goals include gender equality as well as ending poverty and hunger, achieving decent work for all and combatting climate change, largely depends on empowering rural women and girls.(P. 26)

Markets are vibrant hubs of economic activity in many places, providing shoppers with a ready supply of fresh fruits, vegetables, fish, grains and other staples. We see Hadeja selling and shouting, “Buy my orange! Buy my banana! Sweet, paw-paw! Buy my orange, banana, paw-paw, papaya! Na de sweetest juice in the world!” (P.59). Her shouting goes in vain for she gets no response and her chanting get more desperate. She tries to empower herself which is one of the key to Onwueme’s artistic development and shift. Onwueme is telling women never to be discouraged in life that they should keep on fighting hard to put food on the table no matter the situation for there will be an end to bad governance and things will take another turn and job opportunities will be created so that many can be employed. In *What Mama Said*, Imo and the rest of the women summon the rulers in court who are guilty of the crime they committed. It is very ironical that the governments that is supposed to carter for its citizens instead grasps all and allows the masses to toil like wanton boys.

Onwueme projects customary court where the leaders lock up Hadeja, Omi, and Cross, Oshimi and Ikpopa who to them are disturbing and destroying state properties. These people are fighting for their rights to have full access to political, social and economic rights in their locality, ironically, Imo summons them in court and that gives them the opportunity to expose all ills meted to the people of Sufferland when Hadeja airs out her mind and asks the leaders in court:

Hadeja: (Eloquent, dignified.) Your Honour. Country men and women. Fellow citizens of the world. And thank you, my learned friend. You have heard the fictional charges cooked up by my learned friend and the powerful in state to annihilate, exterminate a whole community as if they were pets. Now before you all, I present the people. These traumatized people who have been struggling with these powers that beat and keep them and keep them down to let them be free. Let them have decent jobs, food, water, electricity, roads, life. Just the bare minimum for survival. (spotlight on each prisoner as she points to them with one hand and holds up a can of insecticide in the other. Then Hadeja turns to the jury) just look...look at them. Do any of these look to you like mosquitoes?

Voices: No

Hadeja: Do they look like bugs or pets to you

Voices: No

Hadeja: Do they look like animals to you

Bonny: Not just animals but beasts. (P. 192)

Omwueme gives the voice to Hadeja to speak the mines of the masses because she is conscious of the fact that, everyone is equal before the law. This legal framework is in line with what Laura Fernandez echoed in a forum on global experts to debate how a legal frame work can contribute to women's empowerment in a conference held in Washinton in 2017 on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

The author stands for the fact that, rural women should be equally represented in all collective decisions on nation building, using land and natural resources. Rural women also must be able to acquire skills, finance and technology to make the best use of productive assets. In a nut shell, if rural women can be educated to an extent, the best can come out from them and thus adding their voices and thoughts towards a positive nationhood. Women organizing together can claim a full spectrum of economic, political, social and environmental rights. This goes in line with what Felipa Huanca Llupanqui says in an online article *Commission on the Status of Women rural women* "It is time to recognize rural and Indigenous women that work the land and produce food for the people. Without us the land would be lifeless, that is why public policies should consider us not only because we are women or Indigenous, but because we are pillars of life," (Monday, October 28, 2019 consulted July 29, 2020).

Finally, we can say that Butake and Onwueme settle on drama because they discover that, theatre for good governance is a needed imperative at this time when there are clarion calls for individual and collective efforts to help resolve Cameroon and Nigeria national questions implicated in the collapse of the respectives societal system in particular and African in general. In recent time, theatre has gone beyond mere entertainment to respond to issues within the society asking questions and pointing to the ways forward towards positive regeneration of the society. This is the reason why theatre is a good tool for addressing bad governance in Cameroon and Nigeria in particular and the world at large. From this stand point of theatre for women and good governance, we move straight to women as epitome of justice in which we discuss how women try to implement peace and justice in their respective societies.

Women and the Quest for Social Justice

Onwueme and Butake are West African playwrights who are devoted to changing the position of women in their societies, as the plays depict. *What Mama said* and *Lake God* are such plays. The plays portray the stories of women around Hadija, Imo, Omi and Kimbong rebel against the customs of their people. They articulate concern over the undignified position of women in their societies in particular and the world at large. This are situations which most modern female scholars view as an act of injustice meted on women in most African societies. The female protagonists in the above plays inform the basis of our analysis.

Butake is equally against the prevailing gender war in revealing his women without any excuses or excesses. He projects heroine in a society where men fear to act or men have been stripped off their power to act. This conviction is definitely borne out of the Takumbeng and Anlu Principles of the North West region of Cameroon, with which he was very familiar at the time, a phenomenon that casts women in fresh and more dynamic lights, uplifting the heroism of women to greater heights. He also unleashed the power of women to effect meaningful change. This happened before Butake eyes and he saw the hidden energy of

women, strength and the capability of rural women. In his fictional works, he has given an authoritative voice to the woman to prove to the world that she has a big role to play as far as peace and justice are concerned in the society. Butake's plays under study therefore dramatize in much more emotional and vivid terms the ferocity of the proverbial sleeping dogs.

Our determined authors in their plays tackle indigenous themes and these themes could be seen as a media form which comments on post-colonial politics and the liberation of women in general and rural women in particular. It has therefore been the priority of some contemporary African playwrights like ours to highlight women's experiences in both indigenous and post-colonial settings in some of their works. Although this assertion may appear contradictory, it however presents ingenious ways in which authors do not only highlight biases against women in strict cultural communities, but have employed cultural media to raise issues that clearly differentiate their statuses from those of men folk. These issues resonate in socio-political and cultural debates that animate postcolonial Cameroonian and Nigerian politics, and in many ways have helped to differentiate and redefine rural women's efforts to liberate themselves from different degrees of oppression. These circumstances have motivated our dramatists to foreground rural women who have opted for positive change in the society.

Furthermore, empowering rural women and their local communities is the concern of our authors in question. They give them the necessary tools or better still enhance legal knowledge and rights awareness to promote justice in their various societies by promoting their professional participation in the justice sector. They are conscious of the fact that, these set of women are excluded from decision-making processes and unable to access formal justice structures. They thought it wise to empower and promote the rule of law in their communities by ensuring that everyone truly is equal before the law and protected by the law. Our playwrights project women like, Kimbong, Ma Kusham in *lake God* Hadeja, Oshimi and Omi who stand their grounds that there must be change for the advancement of the society. Eva Maggay in *Motherhood's Relevance in Nation-building* states:

Since the practice of giving out awards has become part of today's culture, I propose that another award be created to honour outstanding women. It is time we elevated rural women to an exalted position much higher than the "taken for granted" status it has been accorded in this male-dominated and often chauvinistic society (P. 16).

Rural women play an active role in the agricultural sector in the society of the authors under study in particular and in the entire world. In *What Mama said*, Onwueme, through Hadija ensures that the corrupt government officials are taken to court for the ill treatment of the country side people and their environment.

Ayi Kwei Armah (1976) gives a positive image of the woman. To him, African women play active roles which are entirely positive. Lorentzon (2000) remarks of Armah's women that "Armah gives his female characters an altogether positive role; while there are both good and bad men here, there are no bad women. All cruelty and treachery stem from male characters, while only virtuous qualities are found in the women" (P.231). Women take charge of affairs of the state and move the story. They play roles that defy traditional conventions of women in the African society. They are leaders, warriors, pathfinders, defenders and protectors. The authors

under study have given a voice to the women to straighten up things in the society in a way to tell the world that, women in general and rural women in particular should be included in decision making if the state must be up right.

Onwueme and Butake project the Nigerian and the Cameroonian environment that forms the ambience of their development. Their drama, therefore, is shaped by the appalling conditions of deprivation, mismanagement, corruption and greed that reign in both societies. By combining the cultural approach to literary analysis, we have identified revolutionary impulses in the plays under study. The analysis concludes that, rightly, Butake and Onwueme advocate adequate conscientization and sensitization of the people since peoples protest, revolt and uprising seems to be the only means of effecting change and establishing a society where justice, fair play and equitable sharing of the commonwealth will prevail.

Finally, this chapter suggests that the sexual division of labour in our society, today, may not be as fixed as we think. It suggests that the subordination of women and the dominance of men are neither natural nor eternal. A change toward a more egalitarian society is possible, a change that could fulfill the potentials of all human beings that is women and men. Also, this section recommends that to change these difficult relations between women and men, we have to examine and challenge the systems of inequality and subordination in our own countries and throughout the world: these could be based on race or ethnicity, colour, class, age, sexual orientation, or nationality. In addition, we need to consider the organization of work and the effects of modern life and work on the environment.

Conclusion

Butake and Onwueme's narratives foreground ways through which one can read the rural woman in their respective societies. Their plays present the rural woman as an active participant in the cultural, social, economic and political advancement of her community, thereby projecting her sense of community engagement and her commitment in building the nation. Their feminists as well as womanists vision infuses through theatre for development. Hence, the rural women are seen both as assertive human beings and those who are partner in nation building. In this regards, the rural women in the plays under study do not seek to fight the men neither do they seek to replace them. They function in a way that enable them to be considered as an indispensable pillars in the transformation of their respective societies.

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