

## THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED PLAYS OF NEW MILLENNIUM YORÙBÁ PLAYWRIGHTS

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### Abstract

Creative writers often make use of the female characters in their works to reflect the realities in the society. In a society that is male dominated, there are tendencies for the male writers to portray women in the negative sense exposing their vices and weaknesses. In the real Yorùbá society, women are seen as good mothers, caring wives, and supporters of their husbands' good will. The new millennium Yoruba playwrights have been criticized for portraying women in negative light using popular stereotypes. However, feminists believe that women are part of the society and that work of art should reflect their laudible roles as integral members of the society. This paper, therefore, examines how the new millennium Yorùbá playwrights depict the female characters in the selected plays. Using a qualitative approach in the analysis of Fọ̀lọ̀rúnşọ̀ Adéníyí's *Ìyàwó Ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, Àkàngbé Adéníyí's *È̀pà-ń-para rẹ̀* and Dẹ̀bò Awẹ̀'s *Àpótí Alákarà*, the study discovers through the negative portrayal of female characters that millennium playwrights indeed depict women in negative light.

**Keywords:** Caring wife, Male-dominated, Playwright, Stereotype, Yoruba

### 1.1 Introduction

Yorùbá drama and its criticism constituted significant area of scholarship yet to be explored to its fullest. Among works that can be cited on Yorùbá drama are Clark 1979, Ọ̀gúndẹ̀jì (1981), Arohunmọ̀lọ̀şẹ̀ (1982), Adéoyè (1984), Adégbọ̀lá (1985) and Àkàngbé (2005). All these works mentioned have contributed to the promotion of some Yorùbá playwrights, bringing their works of art to the limelight. However, the new millennium plays are written in the second millennium from 2000 to date. The plays for this paper were selected from them. The

three plays selected are Fọlọrunṣọ Adéníyì's *Ìyàwó Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀*, Àkàngbẹ Adéníyì's *Eépà ñpara rẹ* and Dẹ̀bò Awẹ's *Àpótí Alákàrà*. The criteria for selecting these plays is that they "all" focused on contemporary issues in the society like illicit affairs, money rituals, love of money and love issues. Language has a key position in drama as it is, like in real life, the most important means of communication on stage. It has to be regarded as one of the basic features of drama that are related to both dramatic characters and the actions. Dramatic language is often rhetorical and poetic. Drama uses language in ways which differ from standard usage in order to draw attention to the artistic nature.

This paper will discuss themes in the selected plays and feminist theory as it relates to the female image in the plays. Women are being portrayed as lovers of money, silent killers, covetous beings, fornicators and other related vices

## 1.2 Synopsis of the Plays

We want to discuss the synopsis of the selected plays to throw more light on the female image.

### **Adéníyì Fọlọhunṣọ (*Àpótí Alákàrà*)**

The play starts from Kàrímù's house. Kàrímù and his wife were discussing Àńwòó, the only daughter of the family who is promiscuous. Kàrímù tries in his power to discipline Àńwòó at various times but her mother always has a contrary opinion. After her secondary school education, she meets Oyè, who introduces her to drug peddling. Àńwòó and Oyè plans to push cocaine to the United States. They are caught in the process, Oyè is shot dead on the spot while Àńwòó is arrested and kept in police custody. The play reaches the climax when at the border, Àńwòó and Oyè are caught, Oyè is killed instantly and Àńwòó is detained for some weeks before her release.

Àńwòó's classmates, Banjo who studies Agriculture and later carried on farming on a large scale becomes very rich, and employs Àńwòó as a member of staff. Kàrímù laments that with all the efforts geared towards raising Àńwòó to be a responsible adult yielded no positive result. Àńwòó is the *Àpótí Alákàrà* in the play. The play ends on a tragic note.

### **Fọlọrunṣọ Adéníyì (*Ìyàwó Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀*)**

The plays starts from Ojọawo's house. Ojọawo is planning to marry Rọlákẹ as his wife. According to Yorùbá belief, the Ifá Oracle is consulted, and Rọlákẹ's father agree that her

daughter must marry Ojóawo. Róláké refuses bluntly that she cannot marry Ojóawo that he is as old as her father. She marries Oláyíwoḷá, a lawyer instead. After some years, the marriage is not fruitful, even though there is respect for legal marriage which is termed *Ìyàwó Ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, yet, the marriage hit the rock and Róláké comes back to marry Ojóawo, and gives birth to a set of twins three times. The other part of the play is about Wọ́núádé and Bánkólé. Wọ́núádé is the legal wife of Bánkólé (*Ìyàwó Ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*). When she realizes that her husband is flirting around with Fọ́lášádé. She poisons her husband and also plans with a gang to kill her son, Dàpò, because he is antagonising her of all her evil deeds. The play reaches the climax when Wọ́núádé killed her husband. God delivers Dàpò from the hands of the ritual killers who later come back to kill Wọ́núádé. The play ends on a tragic note.

### **Àkàngbé Adeníyì (*Èpà-ń-para rẹ*)**

The play starts from Bósẹ's house where they are seen chatting as young girls about their boyfriends. Dọtun pays everything needed for Bósẹ's traditional wedding and the marriage is successful. At a point, Dọtun shifts his love towards Déọ́lá, a student in his school and abandons his wife. He spends heavily for Déọ́lá by buying foodstuffs, lace materials, bush meat etc. The play reaches climax when Dọtun is sacked from his place of work. A big quarrel ensues between Dọtun and Déọ́lá. Dọtun uses jùjú to curse Déọ́lá and turns her to a mad person. Thieves burgle Dọtun's house, cart away his belongings and do-away with his salary. Dọtun is the *Èpà-ń-para ẹ*. He thinks he is enjoying wealth and life, but on the long run, his life is left with nothing. The play ends on a tragic note.

### **1.3 Themes in the Selected Plays**

At this juncture, we shall discuss the themes in the selected plays.

#### **a. Themes on love of money**

The issue of money in today's society is very germane. People can go any length in search of money. They care less about actions to be taken as long as it will fetch them a lot of money.

In *Ìyàwó Ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, Wọ́núádé is the wife of Chief Bánkólé. She perceives that her husband is flirting around with Fọ́lášádé. She decides to kill her husband so that all his belongings will be hers alone.

In *Àpótí Alákàrà*. After their secondary school education, Àńwòó's father advises her to go into teaching profession. She refuses that she cannot do such a job. Bádéjò, their classmate, encourages them to join the agricultural group proposed by the government, they both refused. They plan to push drug. Oyè and Àńwòó spend their time with police at the border and Oyè dies while Àńwòó sustains injuries. After being tortured by the police, she finds her way back to the village and becomes a casual worker under her classmate, Bádéjò.

Dotun is financially stable. He gives Deola whatever she wants but does not give his wife at home. Deola demands items such as clothes, shoes, bra and handset from Dotun and he buys all, even for her friend.

**a. Theme of illicit affairs**

Love issue is very paramount and germane among the youths. In other to woo the girls of these days, the young male adult can fabricate lies, exonerate themselves to be what they are not, put on false identity in the name of false love. In *Àpótí Alákàrà*, the love issue ensured between Oyè and Àńwòó. Àńwòó falls in love with Oyè, they both agree to travel overseas so that they will cement their love and also have plenty of money. The love issue deprives Àńwòó the sense of listening to her father. In Adéníyí Fólórúnṣó's *Ìyàwó Ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, Ojọawo was bent on marrying Róláké. Róláké has a University education, while Ojọawo is a farmer. Róláké refuses bluntly that she cannot marry a farmer and get married to Ọ̀láyíwọ̀lá, a lawyer. Instead, for years, they had no child Róláké retraces her step back to Ojọawo and gives birth to twins thrice. In Àkàngbẹ Adéníyí's *È̀èpà-ń-para-rẹ̀*, the love issue ensues between Dọtun and Déọ́lá. Bósẹ is the legal wife of Dọtun. Dọtun shifts his love to Déọ́lá; a student in his school. He spends heavily on Déọ́lá by buying clothes, food stuffs, bush meat etc. Towards the end of the play, Dọtun uses *jùjú (charms)* to curse Déọ́lá, and Déọ́lá becomes mad there. We must note that there is genuine love in the Yorùbá society. Yorùbá people show love to their wives by seeing them as mothers, wives, companions etc. The kind of love in the society today as being portrayed by these playwrights is 'fake-love'. The new generation of youths do not portray love in its true sense; and this is the reason why there is bitterness and strife at the end of their love affairs.

**b. Theme on parents/children relationship**

It is common in the society today that parents always show their children love in order to help them become good citizens. Kàrímù is Àńwòó's father. He always correct Àńwòó for

all her wrong doings, but Àńwòó's mother is always backing her up not minding her evil deeds. Kàrímù corrects Àńwòó concerning the mini-skirts she always puts on and how she flirts around, but her mother tells him that he should allow Àńwòó to enjoy her life. At the end of the play, Àńwòó regrets all her immoral deeds by serving her classmate as a casual worker.

In *Ìyàwò Òlẹ̀lẹ̀*, Róláké refuses bluntly that she will not marry Ojoawo. She confides in her mother her plight. We can see Àjoké pleading with Eyínafé not to reveal the secret of the letter to anyone. She does not want to put Róláké in trouble before his dad. It is pertinent to note that women always cherish and care for their children.

#### 1.4 Feminist Theory and the Selected Plays

Jean Jacques Rousseau's (1722) radical statement about the human condition can be turned around to specifically fit the woman. "The woman is born free and everywhere in chains". According to Rousseau, women are born free as their male counterpart. Therefore, they should not be anywhere in chains. By the 19th century, social call and reform had metamorphosed into the different suffragette movements in Europe. Though the movements were not uniformly experienced in the different countries, they had the same view that women were victims of men in the society dominated by men. Feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice. It is believed that literary work will support women and their ideas.

Feminism, a term that comes from the Latin word "femina" which means "pertaining to women", could be traced back to the 17th century. In Europe, where women in the aristocratic class began to demand for improved rights and opportunities, many writers had written different things about women in our society. In an article "Feminism and its Implications for the Nigeria society", Adebayo (1999) quotes Register (1975), as follows:

A literary work should provide role model, instill a positive sense of feminine identity by portraying women as self-actualizing, whose identity is not dependent on men. Many literary works lack a positive female image.

Feminist believes that the work of art should portray women as assets to the society and not liabilities and evil beings.

## 2.0 Female Image in the selected plays

It is in this context that this paper examines the female image in Fọlọrunṣọ Adéníyì's Ìyàwó Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀, Àkàngbẹ̀ Adéníyì's Èẹ̀pà-ń-para rẹ̀ and Dẹ̀bọ̀ Awẹ̀'s Àpótí Alákarà.

This paper examines the portrayal of women in the selected plays under the following headings:

- a. Women as silent killers and wicked beings
- b. Women and immortality
- c. Women as deceivers
- d. Women as seducers
- e. Women and abuse

### 2.1 Women as Silent Killers and Wicked Beings

The playwrights in the selected plays portray women as wicked. They also buttress the Yorùbá saying, "obìnrin bímọ̀ fúnni kò pé kó ma pani" (that a woman bears children for a man does not debar her from killing the man). The portrayal of women by the new millennium Yorùbá playwrights is negative. Women are being portrayed as wicked, killers, deceivers, lovers of money and evil doers.

In *Ìyàwó Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀*, Wọ̀núádé, Chief Bánkólé's wife kills her husband because of jealousy. She attempts to kill her own son as well because the son refuses to cooperate with her on her evil deeds.

**Wọ̀núádé:**... mo fẹ́ kí ẹ̀ gbà mí

È má jẹ́ kí ó bó lówó mi, ó fẹ́ pa mí ni,  
èmi náà ò sì ní kọ ohunkóhun tó bá ṣẹ̀lẹ̀ sí i. p.80

(... I want you to save me  
Do not let him escape, he wants to kill me  
And I will not hesitate to silent him)

Wọ̀núádé kills her husband because of love of money and jealousy. She shows her wickedness as she attempts to kill her son as well. Her son, Dàpọ̀, is not happy with all that Wọ̀núádé does after the demise of his father. He is irritated by his mother's dialiance with her concubine and in annoyance sends him out. He says:

**Dàpò:**È jáde síta, ẹ kó iranù yín jáde síta.

Ilé bàbáa tẹmi kǐ ẹ ilé ìtura... p. 74

(Get out, get out with your nonsense.

My father's house is not a hotel)

Because of what transpires between her and her son, Wonuade goes to contract hiredkillers to kill Dàpò.

**Wónuadé:**Èyin àlàyé, ẹ gba; fòtò o rẹ rẹ é. Ilé ẹkó gíga ti

Yunifásitì Ẹkó ló wà. Kò ga ju ẹsẹ bàtà márùn-ún lọ. Ó

mó lára diẹ... p. 85

(Guys, take; this is his photograph.

He is student at the University of Lagos.

He is about five feet tall.

He is a bit fair in complexion)

## 2.2 Women and Immorality

In the plays under review, though both the female and male characters are guilty of immortality, the female characters are usually the victims. For instance, Dòtun is very promiscuous, a woman wrapper with sugar coated mouth, but the playwrights pronounces Déólá's act as worse. Deola knows Baba Seyi's wife, yet gets along with him.

In *Èpà-ń-para-rẹ*, women are portrayed as covetous, promiscuous, wicked, evil beings and greedy. Immediately Dòtun shifts his love towards Déólá, Déólá demands much more from him because of her covetousness.

**Dòtun:**Ó ki ọwó bọ àpò agbádá rẹ, ó sì yọ igba náírà jáde.(Ó kó o fún un) jòwó má bínú pé ó kéré, oşù ti di gberefu ni..(*Èpà ń para rẹ*. p.48

(He slids his hand in his agbádá attire, and brings out

200 Naira. He gives her) please, don't be angry that it's small.

The month is yet to bear fruit)

Dòtun is financially stable. He gives Déólá whatever she wants but does not do the same for his wife at home. Déólá demands items such as clothes, shoes, bra set from Dòtun and he buys same for her friend, Tèjú testifies to it. This excerpt portrays this:

- Tèjú: Déólá sọ pé owó rẹ ko wọn naa... Egbèrún kan náírà opa ni...  
(Déólá says the price is moderate. One thousand naira per yard)
- Tèjú: Bàtà onílẹ gogoro ẹlégbèrún kan abò náírà  
(High heel shoes of one thousand five hundred naira)
- Níyì: Èn-èn (Really)
- Tèjú: Àpò ifàlówó ẹlégbèrún náírà  
(Handbag of a thousand naira)
- Níyì: Èn-èn (Really)
- Tèjú: Pátá àwòtẹlẹ aláwọ funfun kan, àádọjọ náírà.  
(White pants of one hundred and fifty naira)
- Níyì: Lóòótọ...(Really).p. 50

In *Èpà n para rẹ*, Dòtun, the womaniser, sugar-coated mouth shows love to Déólá in a cunny way. Despite the fact that Mama Şeyí, Dòtun's wife is a friend to her, they both attend the same church, yet, she goes ahead to flirt with Dòtun.

**Dòtun:** Déólá, mo fẹ kí a jọ máa rìn, kí á sì máa  
fi ọrọ àşírí han ara wa.

(I want us to be getting along)

**Déólá:** Şebí a sì ti jọ wà tẹlẹ náà? A kú ti mọra ọjọ ti pé.

Mo mọ ilé yín, mo sì ti mọ ọnà yín pẹlú.p.10

(We are together before, we have known each  
other for a long time. I know your abode).

**Déólá:** But báwo ni a ti máa şe ti Màmá Şeyí si,

mo 'mean' iyàwó yín...

(What will be done concerning mama Seyi's case)

**Dòtun:** Şebí o máa n wá sí ilé wa tẹlẹ?



(But, you are always in our house)

**Déplá:** Dáradára

(very good)

**Dòtun:** Màmá Sèyí sì mò pé ‘class teacher’ rẹ ni mo jẹ...

(Mama Seyi’s knows that I am your class teacher) p. 35

Déplá goes ahead with illicit affairs with Bàbá Sèyí despite the fact that she knows her wife.

In *Ìyàwó Ọlẹ̀lẹ̀*, Wọnuadé kills her husband, Chief Bánkólé Aşégilówó, and diverts her love to a worker named Ọlájubù in her husband's company.

**Wọnúadé:** ... Hello, sẹ ọgbẹní Ọlájubù nìyẹn? Awẹléwà ọkùnrin...

(Hello, is that Mr. Ọlájubù a handsome man)

**Ọlájubù:** Irú ọrò wo ni iyàwó olóyè n bá mi sọ lórí tẹlifóònù lẹ̀ẹkan yẹn?...

(Which kind words is she telling me on the phone?)

**Wọnúadé:** Àyànfẹ mi ọwọ̀n, báwo ni işẹ? Nişó nínú yàrá mi lókè, kí a lọ sòrò wa, kò séwu fún ẹ, má fòyà rará

(My lover, how is work? Let’s go upstairs and have our discussion, no problem don’t be afraid). p 67

The language that Wọnúadé uses to qualify her boyfriend shows that she is immoral. She uses ‘Àyànfẹ’ (a lover), ‘Awẹléwà ọkùnrin’ (handsome man). She also has the gut to take Ọlájubù to her inner room for discussion.

### 2.3 Women as Deceivers

In our society today, some women behave deceitfully to cover-up the social evils committed by them. In *Eèpà-ń-para rẹ*, Dòtun and Déplá are in the beer parlour where Dòtun meets her ex-boyfriend and pretends to Dòtun that he is her brother. Déplá excuses herself to go and greet her ex boyfriend.

**Déplá:** Àitètè mú olè olè n mólóko. Àbí iwọ kọ lo ti pa mí sí ‘quarter to’.

(When the hunted hunts the hunter, you left me at ‘quarter to’)

**Débo:** Ká sọ ojú abẹ níkódó, èmi sì tún nífẹẹ rẹ dénú, tìrẹ ni a kò lè sọ.

(To be frank, I still love you more)

**Déolá:** Bí ojú wa ti tún gán-án-ni ara wọn bá yí, èmi náà ti tún kún fún  
ìfẹ rẹ

(As we have seen again, I am falling in love for you)

**Dàpọ:** Tètè release lady yí o, kí ‘man’ yẹn má bàà bínú

(Release this lady quickly, so that the man will not be angry). p. 82

Déolá lies to Bàbá Sẹyí as she pretends that Dẹbò is his brother, whereas, Dẹbò is her ex-boyfriend. They discussed their love for each other.

#### 2.4 Women and Abuse

In Yoruba society, abuse is a common phenomenon. People abuse one another to show that they are not in agreement with what the person is doing. Abuse is in improper use of a thing, often to unfairly or improperly gain benefit. Abuse can come in many forms such as physical or verbal maltreatment, injury, assault, violation, rape, unjust practices, crimes, or other kinds of aggression. Some sources described abuse as “socially constructed” which means there may be more or less recognition of the suffering of a victim at different times and societies. Abuse can also come when one feels cheated. Abuse is common in polygamous homes because it is a means of expressing their feelings and thoughts towards one another. Mama Sẹyí in *Èpà n para rẹ* believes that Dọtun, her husband, is cheating on her, and she is aware that there is illicit affair between Dọtun and Déolá. She reigns abuses on Dọtun her husband as a way of venting her anger.

**Bọsẹ:** Sẹ Déolá ni ilé ifowopamọ titun tí ẹ n fi owó si lódò bá yí?

Adéolá, International bank ...

**Bọsẹ:** Ẹ kú iyà, iyà òhún ló n fi yin ká un. Kò jẹ kí ẹ níyì lójú egbé ...

**Dọtun:** Ìyáláyáá rẹ niyà n jẹ kú lọ

**Bọsẹ:** Bí kò bá sẹ pé igbá ìròrí rẹ ti dojú délẹ, o kò mò pé ó ti tẹ lówọ iyá, o kò níyì lówọ bàbá, àrípòsé ni ọ lówọ ẹbí, àrísintó sì ni ọ lówọ iyá.

**Bọsẹ:** Bàba bàba iwọ náà laláironú. Ìyáláyáá ẹ ladàgbàmádanú, iwọ oló sí akóbáni yí. p. 82.

The use of words like ‘iyá’ – poverty, iyáláyàá (your grand mother), ‘idojú-délé’-(one who cannot think straight), ‘àrípòsé’ (a dishonoured fellow), aláínirònú – (one who cannot think straight), adàgbà mádanú (a nonentity), olóṣì (a pauper), akóbáni (an implicator ). All these words describe Dòtun as a nonentity and a fool.

In *Ìyàwó ọ̀lẹ̀lẹ̀*, when Róláké and Adéyiwoḷá discuss about Ojọawo, Róláké reigns abuses on him as well:

**Adéyiwoḷá:** Ñ jẹ bàbá nàà sì wà láyé, àbí ó tilẹ̀ ti kú sọrun àjànte pàápàá?

(is the man still alive? Or is he dead?)

**Róláké:** Oníranù un – ẹ, awákúmàríí sì n jẹkọ yangan ... Àgbààyà ara a ẹ, dindinrìn àgbà, o jẹ lọ wá iyàwó tì ẹ fẹ́ kí ojó ó tó tẹnu bepo fún-un ...

(That nonentity who refuses to die, old cargo,

a dullard should go ahead to look for his own wife)p. 17

The use of these words (oníranù (a nonentity), awákúmàríí (one seeks death unsuccessfully), àgbààyà (foolish old person) dindinrìn àgbà- (a dullard). All these words are used to demean and destroy Ojọawo’s self-esteem as a useless, good for nothing fellow.

### Women as Seducers

In our society today, women are being portrayed as (alákòóbá), an implicator or one who puts others in trouble. Even when there is illicit affair between a man and a woman, the woman remains the victim and the supposed cause of the problem, especially when their coming together results to pregnancy. The new millennium playwrights also portray women as seducers.

In *Èpànpàra ẹ̀*, when Déọlá and Dòtun are discussing their love issue, Déọlá uses language to seduce Bàbá Sẹ̀yí:

**Dòtun:** Ìṣẹ́jú mélòò ha ni? Tó fi mọ ounje, èmi kii jẹ níbẹ̀...

**Déọlá:** Aláwomọ tilẹ̀ niyàwó yín ọ̀hún, bóyá kò mọ pé oun ti gbó sá. Ìgbà tirẹ̀ ti lọ, ó sì ti di tàná. p. 40

**Dòtun:** (For how many minutes is that?

Even for food, I don’t eat at there anymore)

Déolá: (Your wife is very stubborn, she doesn't agree that she is old, time is not on her side)

By saying 'òun ti gbó sá – (she is old) Deola means to seduce Bàbá Şèyí by disparaging his wife so he can continue with her alone.

### Conclusion

From the foregoing, the new millennium Yoruba playwrights have creatively represented the female characters in their plays in a negative light. Any portrayal of women that is not balanced with a reflection of women virtues is a great disservice to the integrity of womenfolk. After all, women like Moremi. Tinubu, Emotan, Margaret Ekpo, and Kudirat Abiola, were known to have left indelible marks in the sands of time. It is suggested that creative artists should represent female character in their plays positively since they are active members of the society whose contributions to the socio-economic development of their society cannot be ignored.

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