

REVENGE DRAMA, GENDER AND METAPHYSICAL WARFARE IN JOHN PEPPER CLARK'S *OZIDI*

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Abstract

Female characters were created as appendages, voiceless and weaker vessels by male playwrights in early dramatic works for decades. In African dramaturgy, the central stage of literary productions was mainly dominated by patriarchal figures as instruments for peace, change and socio-economic transformation. Previous studies on gender and drama have been carried out by scholars but no significant attention has been paid to revenge drama, metaphysical warfare and the propelling role of woman gender for justice. However, this paper, explores revenge dramaturgy, gender and metaphysical warfare in John Pepper Clark's *Ozidi*. The study adopts feminist theoretical framework to foreground the discussion. The primary text was purposively selected based on its thematic relevance while secondary materials gathered from the internet were consulted and utilized to substantiate the findings. The research shows the deployment of metaphysical powers by archetypal grandmother to dismantle the dreaded Orua Council of Elders and the fortification of her grandson to avenge the gruesome murder of Ozidi to spite his idiotic brother and king, Temugedege. The Council negatively channeled their psychological energies and power by installing a mentally deficient kinsman as their king, leading to disorder, vendetta and vengeance. The traditional epic drama explores the fortification of Ozidi the second by Uream, his maternal grandmother who serves as psycho-stimulant and propellant, to emerge victorious. The play captures African metaphysical powers, cultural beliefs and other features of oral traditions.

Keywords: Metaphysical Warfare, Revenge, Propellant, Justice, Elders

Introduction

African literary works are often characterized with various elements of oral traditions which clearly differentiate them from the Western texts. Creative writers are psychologically conscious of the fact that they are writing mainly for African audience and so they weave oral resources into their artistic works. Popular writings of Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O and female authors like Chimamanda Adichie, Zulu Sofola, Marriama Ba, Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa, to mention a few, contain elements of African culture irrespective of the genre of literature. Like the prose and

poetry genres, the African dramatic works feature oral traditions transmitted from one generation to another. There are verbal and non-verbal folkloric materials which are meant to showcase the cultural heritage of the people. Verbal Folklore are oral resources such as folktales, myths, legends, cultural songs, proverbs, riddles, folk epics, chants and incantations, tongue-twisters, instrumental music, and so on. Non-verbal folklores on the other hand are primordial cultural activities that people do in the society which include ritual rites, initiations, folk dances, pouring of libation, chieftaincy confirmation, coronation, funeral and marriage ceremonies, festivals, ancestral worship, and religious practices. All these have become integral part of African literature, particularly the drama genre. Devarrdgi (2009:438) notes that “the study of characters and their actions in a literary text, and at the same time provides us with a thorough understanding of the nature of man in general.” Playwrights often portray characters with uncontrollable instinctual drives for violence and criminal acts. There seems to be no forgiveness for offences committed and so vengeance becomes the only option to seek redress and attain justice. Although revenge drama can be traced to Classical and Elizabethan periods, several of such plays abound across the world today. Among the Elizabethan plays, Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* are typical instances as they present murder cases and the attempt made by aggrieved male protagonists to seek revenge. This study therefore examines revenge dramaturgy, gender and metaphysical warfare in John Pepper Clark’s *Ozidi*.

Over time, African dramatic literature portrayed female characters as appendages, voiceless and weaker vessels by playwrights while their male counterparts featured as dominant, outspoken and authoritarian in patriarchal structured societies; hence, in African dramaturgy, the central stage of literary productions was mainly dominated by patriarchal figures as instrument for peace, change and socio-economic transformation. The female

gender seems to be relegated to the background. The study of Abdul, *et al* (2011:6) which finds that “the culture of patriarchy, male chauvinism and anarchy has undermined the rights of women and the outcome of this is the exploitation and marginalization of women in the affairs of development both at the private and public spheres.” Although women are regarded as weakly and voiceless in the early works of writers the fact remains that womenfolk have their peculiar powers in addressing personal and societal issues. Their deployment of psychic and physical energies during conflictual situations orchestrated by male characters could be reinforced with their metaphysical powers. The deployment of metaphysical energies for vengeance and restoration of justice has therefore become the main thrust of this paper.

Objectives of the Study

Over the decades, literary writers have portrayed the male gender as both physical and spiritually endowed with energies and influence to address challenges for individuals or their community as a whole. Men are regarded as emissaries, conflict facilitators, combatants and custodians of the laws in their societies. In this study, attempt is made to examine revenge drama, gender and metaphysical warfare in John Pepper Clark’s *Ozidi* with a view to establishing the physical and spiritual energies exerted by women in their course of seeking vengeance in socio-cultural settings. Specifically, the objectives of the study are to examine: (i) Concept of Revenge Drama (ii) Gender Discourse in Drama (iii) Metaphysical Influence in African drama (iv) Metaphysical Warfare in Clark’s *Ozidi*

Conceptual Clarification

This section will briefly clarify some terms that are vital in this paper.

Revenge Drama: The subject matter of revenge is associated with tragic plays with central characters attempting to avenge the death or evil machinations perpetrated against them or their loved ones. Abdullah (1999:1) notes that revenge tragedy “enacts the degeneration of the revenger as he falls victim to injustice, and resulting conflict which pitches the desires of

the individual against a higher earthly power who offers no legitimate access to the fulfilment of these desires.” The scholar maintains that “having no recourse to justice, the subject in these tragedies loses self-autonomy as a result of which he needs to refashion the self in order to achieve his desire for blood revenge.” The protagonists in revenge tragedies are not restricted to male characters alone since the latter can also seek vengeance or protest whenever there is injustice in their society.

Salami-Agunloye (2006:99) finds that “our foremothers were known to have accomplished great things; displayed exceptional skill and talent; stood up against oppression, injustice and contributed much to the society.” The scholar further reveals that “They had difficult challenges which they surmounted and were still able to participate. In this regard, we remember the likes of Emotan of Benin, Queen Idia, and Queen Ubi, among others.” Revenge dramas are tragedies and the protagonists are usually creatively endowed with both physical and supernatural powers to enable them or her defeat the enemies on the battlefield. The protagonist may confront ghosts, hybrid characters, giants and monsters during the journey to seek revenge. Abdullah (1999:11) finds that revenge tragedies feature an individual who takes private action for a crime committed against a loved one, usually because he/she is denied legitimate justice.” the foregoing therefore shows that apart from male characters that embark on revenge missions in drama, women have also been portrayed as characters capable of confronting enemies in any oppressive society.

Gender and Metaphysical Discourse: Gender issues have received significant attention in literature from time immemorial. In the literary works of male playwrights, women characters are assigned secondary roles and they are portrayed as docile, voiceless and appendages to their male counterparts. For instance, the works of Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, Sam Okala, Ngugi Wa Thiong’O, Efua Sutherland, Ibrahim Hussein, Tewfik Al-Hakim, Ola Rotimi and Ahmed Yerima, to mention a few, present gender issues with men as principal characters.

However, in the past decades, female characters are being assigned major roles in dramatic works. Examples of such artistic works include Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu* and *Moruntodun*, Salami-Agunloye's *More Than Dancing* and *The Queen Sisters*, Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods*, and so on. Abdul, *et al* (2011:5) note that "the pre-colonial and colonial eras revealed active participation of women in activities aimed to better their lot. The intervention of women in social and political landscape helped to improve their status at the national and regional levels."

The Metaphysical realm connotes the spiritual or supernatural world and the activities of characters. In literature, the physical representative world is mostly portrayed in sociological and anthropological works while magical realism and gothic writings present characters and settings that are hybridized. In African dramaturgy, certain characters may have metaphysical powers and also influence actions of other individuals to achieve their goals. These include priests, priestesses, witches and wizards, to mention a few. The spiritual powers of witches are evident in J. P. Clark's *Ozidi* chosen for this study. Jayeola-Omoyeni, *et al* (2015:362) observes that "witchcraft is the supernatural interference in the natural community lifestyle and behaviour. It is a universal phenomenon which has a strong root in community beliefs." The scholars acknowledged Awolalu and Dopamu (1978) who established that people knew that witches were the implacable enemies of the society in which they lived. Witches were said to be very potent and were thought to be responsible for all sorts of misfortunes, accidents, still-born children, sudden deaths, poverty, bareness and a host of other human misfortunes and miseries (cited in Jayeola-Omoyeni, *et al*, 2015).

Literature Review

Previous studies on gender and drama have been carried out by scholars but no significant attention has been paid to revenge drama, metaphysical warfare and the propelling role of woman gender for justice. Ajidahun (2016:97) focuses on revolutionary aesthetics in Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* and *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest* while Doki (2006) investigates foremothers in history as portrayed in Irene-Agunloye's plays, Lucas (2009) focuses on in Irene Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge* while Oyelade and Lateef (2009) examines the taboo motif and gender issues in Irene Salami-Agunloye's *The Queen Sisters* and *More Than Dancing*. Sesan's (2018) study explores the history of wars in Yoruba nationalities, revealing different experiences and challenges faced by women in times of wars as evident in Femi Osofisan's *Morountuodun* and *Women of Owu*. The research of Affiah (2012) is centred on protest, resistance and activism in the drama of Osonye Tess Onwueme while Uko (2004:164) explores the predominant strategy employed by the womenfolk to survive, using the play *Then She Said It*.

The research carried out by Ajidahun (2016:97) explores revolutionary aesthetics of the plays and dramaturgical essences of Femi Osofisan. The study primarily focuses on Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* and *Yungba-Yungba and the Dance Contest*. The playwright exposes the political leadership in Africa as characterised by dictatorship, despotism, tyranny and corruption. The dramatic works present Femi Osofisan's vision in activating the revolutionary consciousness of the masses to protest against oppressive acts, tyranny and social injustice in postcolonial society. Doki's (2006) research examines Irene-Agunloye's plays with major focus on the need to transform the negative stereotypical roles of women patriarchal society. Lucas (2009) finds that the dramatic presentation of women's exploitation and victimisation in Irene Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge* explores the plight of women

and stresses the need to give women a chance. Oyelade and Lateef's (2009) explore the motif of taboo and gender discourse in Irene Salami-Agunloye's in *The Queen Sisters and More Than Dancing*. The researchers assert that women's liberation is absolutely inevitable but the womenfolk should adopt evolutionary strategy rather than revolutionary. The foregoing studies illuminate the current research since it focuses on revenge drama, women gender and metaphysical warfare in John Pepper Clark's *Ozidi*.

Theoretical framework

The study adopts a feminist theoretical framework to foreground the discussion. Oriaku (2012:130) defines Feminism as "an attitude as well as a movement both of which are informed by a notion of male dominance of society and a concomitant marginalisation of women." The research of Ibeku (2015:427) describes feminism as women-oriented because it concentrates on issues that concern women. It is a literary movement that tends to bring about a change in the society, especially in how women are treated. The researcher argues that the theoretical approach attempts to discourage discrimination and humiliation of women; it focuses its attention on the emancipation of women. Although the feminist movement is predominant in the Western societies, African women writers in the past decades have produced numerous creative works to liberate women and agitate for the inalienable rights and privileges of the female gender in socio-cultural, political, economic and religious settings. The role of the African female writers is to dramatise injustices against women and thereby attract society's attention to them (Chukwukere, 1995). The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1990:735) established that "feminist movement sought to change society's prevailing stereotypes of women as relatively weak, passive and dependent individuals who are less rational and more emotional than men." The feminist approach adopted for the

current study is relevant because the entire discourse explores the revenge dramaturgy and the deployment of metaphysical resources by a female gender in actualization of the protagonist's mission in the chosen drama text.

Metaphysical Warfare in Clark's *Ozidi*

John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo has demonstrated his profound knowledge of African cultural beliefs and practices, particularly those among his Ijaw people of the Niger Delta. The playwright explores both physical and supernatural actions as mechanisms that can be deployed by the oppressed and downtrodden in pursuit of justice in socio-cultural settings. Clark was a famous playwright in African drama alongside writers like Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiong'O, Efua Sutherland, Tawfiq Al-Hakim, Athol Fugard, Joe De Craft and so on, who contributed greatly towards the growth and development of African literature, especially the drama genre. His publications include Three Plays (1964): *The Masquerade*, *Song of a Goat* and *The Raft*, *All for Oil*, *The Wives' Revolt* and *Ozidi*. The playwright like other African writers drew on African oral traditions in his dramatic works to show their authenticity, Africaness and flavor embedded in them.

John Pepper Clark's *Ozidi* is an adaptation of translated Ijaw folktales or traditional epic documented as a dramatic work. Okolo (2016:51) describes the realization of oral folktales as written drama or plays as "thematic intertextuality or technical intertextuality." According to the scholar, thematic intertextuality occurs when ideas from oral traditions are transferred into the written, i.e., borrowing of themes and subject matters from the oral to the written. Such borrowings can be seen in any of the genres of the written literature." The findings of Okolo further indicate that technical intertextuality refers to "the appropriation of formulas or

the methods peculiar to oral traditions in written words.” In *Ozidi*, Clark draws on Tamara, thunder, charms, ritual rites of fortification, traditional beliefs in witchcraft and powers of witches, revenge and justice system in traditional Ijaw society. The dramatic text is similar to the Greek, Roman or Elizabethan revenge tragedies documented as world literature.

In the play, Ozidi’s head is cut off and presented to his archetypal idiotic brother and king as a tribute from his rebellious kinsmen and council of elders. Oreame, the witch grandmother of Ozidi junior assumes the role of the spirit of revenge, and trains, fortifies and inspires Ozidi her grandson to revenge the murder of his own father. The eponymous character must bring the collaborators and perpetrators of that evil machination to justice. The revenge dramatic plot structure could be described as follows: (i) the death of Ozidi the first (ii) the training/preparation of Ozidi the Second, and (iii) the revenge mission.

The Death of Ozidi, the First

In the revenge drama, Ozidi was murdered by three elders and members of Orua Council over the tributes for Temugedege, the famous warrior’s brother. The narrative reveals that six kings have died within four floods (years) and there is an agitation for another king. The rotational system of kingship makes Temugedege to emerge as the next king after Ozidi rejected the crown. The emergence of the latter as the traditional ruler of Orua symbolically depicts the enthronement of mediocrity, nonentity, myopic, visionless, mentally deranged and intellectually bankrupt leaders in traditional and modern societies.

The Training/Preparation of Ozidi, the Second

The preparation of Ozidi for the revenge mission begins with his exposure to the causality of his father’s gruesome murder. There are fortification ritual rites, and dramatic investigative

strategies of Ozidi to gather firsthand information about the killers of his own father. This is provided by the wives of the collaborators in the play. Through Oreame, Ozidi becomes a ferocious and possessor of mystical powers. She inspires Ozidi, combining her witchcraft with trickery and the power of the old man of the forest.

The Revenge Mission

The subject matter of revenge is a recurring decimal in dramatic literature across the world. From the classical period through Elizabethan or Renaissance tradition till date, there are literary works on revenge, especially in drama. It is about a battle for justice and harmonious co-existence in society. In the play, after Ozidi has been fortified with supernatural powers, the battle begins but ends disastrously. Oreame's evil machinations recoil on her and she is murdered by Ozidi after killing the three collaborators and murderers. Ozidi escapes death narrowly at the end of the epic battle as he was attacked by the Smallpox king which his mother refers to it as common Jaws. He becomes more daring, aggressive and deadly. The town of Orua becomes deserted as the townspeople flee due to the dreaded epidemic caused by the Smallpox king.

Female Gender and Metaphysical Powers

The playwright portrays the deployment of metaphysical powers by archetypal grandmother of the tragic hero, Ozidi the second to dismantle the dreaded Orua Council of Elders and avenge the gruesome murder of Ozidi to spite his idiotic brother and king, Temugedege. The Council negatively channeled their psychological energies and resources by installing a mentally deficient kinsman as their king, leading to disorder, vendetta and restoration of peace and justice. The traditional epic drama explores the fortification of Ozidi the Second by Ureame, his maternal grandmother who serves as psycho-stimulant and propellant, to emerge

victorious. Oreame is portrayed as a wicked woman with certain supernatural powers. The discussion between Orea and Temugedege attests to this:

OREA: I told you they sent two men with word
Your brother has suffered some injury.
That, to my mind, confirms the worst.
TEMUGEDEGE: take off your silly fainting self out of our sight
Before we strike you down. Like your mother Oreame,
You have become a witch and will suck your own kind.
Out, out of here before we do you harm.
My brother has led
An expedition out to provide me royal tributes.
In one hand he will bring me sweet maidens,
In the other slaves when he comes home. (p.28).

Oreame encourages Ozidi, the second to be as warlike and courageous as his late father, thus; “Say what you will, my leopard boy shall pounce; Upon them all and tear each limb to limb” (p.34). She is pleased that Ozidi beats up his “playmates every time at wrestling, top or kolo,” and they set upon him like flies (p.35). As one of the strategies to prepare her grandson ahead of the revenge mission, Oreame tests Ozidi’s boldness when she transformed into ‘hill masquerade’, taking up the whole road (p. 37). The terrifying scene is reported, thus;

THE BOY: The hill, look, there was a hill here just now.
I could swear it by Tarakiriye.
OREAME: It must be a phantom hill
For I can’t see any around.
THE BOY: I could swear it.
OREAME: All right, all right, my son,
What about letting me go back to passing
The water you cut short?
THE BOY: It really was here, exactly at this spot,
And it completely blocked all the path.
OREAME: (behind the bush.) Help! A leopard is attacking me,
Oh help!
THE BOY: A leopard, did you say, mother? Then
I must run at once for help from town.
OREAME: Oh, it has mauled me, quite killed me!

Oreame adopts another strategy by going “undergrowth” which caused Ozidi “a great panic in an effort to keep all directions in view at one and the same time” (p.37). The sudden cry of Oreame over danger sends Ozidi “running for safety.” Oreame felt disappointed in the

manner Ozidi reacted over his attack by the “leopard figure.” It is reported that “He runs a few steps and finds the leopard has cut him off in front. He falls back shrieking, while the leopard crouches over him growling and pawing at his covering form. Then to his shock the leopard figure falls apart” (p.38). Ozidi challenges his grandmother to provide him a cutlass so that next time he could “quarry down that hill masquerade and the great cat, the leopard.

His words reveal the foregoing view, thus:

OREAME: (bent and bitter as she packs up her kit) Pity a poor
Women, pity any woman who has
A coward for a son. He sees
The moving shadow of a hill and runs
For shelter. A leopard preys on
His aged mother and he pleads for time
To go into town for help.

THE BOY: (regaining control of himself.) Wait, mother, wait, you
weren't
Expecting I would take on the brute
Bare-handed, were you? Give me a cutlass
Next time, and see whether or not
I don't quarry down that hill for you.
And as for that great cat you call leopard, I will
So cut it up next time with my matchet,
You will not see his spots from the scars.

OREAME: (leading the way out.) Hear him! Oh, Tamara, who you give
A coward for child has no child at all. (p.38).

The playwright draws on Supreme God of the Ijaw ethnic nationality apart from the invocation of supernatural powers in times of warfare. In order to demonstrate his bravery from previous tests by Oreame, Ozidi seriously beat up her disguised grandmother when she “put on the python act” (p.39). She narrates her ordeal:

OREA: How came he beat you so stiff?

OREAME: That was when I put on the python act.

Orea, the water is going cold, and
There's mud in the cloth, so will
You hurry? You see, I yelled to the whelp
A python had struck me down in his coils.
I expected he would run off again and not look back.
But oh no, there he was promptly upon me like a spear,
Pummelling, grappling, and shouting it was no use running

First for a club long enough before one beat
A snake to death, Oh,
That boy almost killed me, I tell you. (p.40)

In the dramaturgy, Ozidi demonstrates his masculinity by felling a huge tree in the forest for his mother and his grandmother. Orea sees his son being transformed into a gorilla while Oreame promised to “seek protection for him before, He comes to harm” (p.41). Oreame visits the old magician and wizard in order to fortify Ozidi. The narrator describes Bouakarakarabiri, the old man of the forest. He is a half-human character who can walk on his head, and in his hand lie the secrets of all life and leaves in the forest” (p.41). The magician stands on his head, with his feet in the air and reclining against a tree. He somersaults and catches Ozidi by the neck between the vice of his feet, throttling and making him shout in pain and panic” (p.43). At this juncture, Oreame intervenes and rescues Ozidi from the entrapment of the old man. She addresses the old man, thus:

OREAME: Bouakarakarabiri, may your feet
Plummet back to earth, and stay there transfixed
Till the chameleon’s cry!

OLD MAN: There’s only once creature in all the bush
Can carry off this trick, and not die
For it!

OREAME: (looks over the boy.) yes, it’s me, Oreame!

OLD MAN: Will you ever play fair in your life?

OREAME: Did you play fair trying to murder
My son before my eyes?

Oreame has shown her supremacy over the Old Man of the forest whose help she has come to seek. With her supernatural powers, she sets free Ozidi, the Second and commanded the Old Man to remain “transfixed till the chameleon’s cry.” However, the purpose of visit is disclosed as the Old Man declares his innocence:

OLD MAN: How was I to know the young man is your son?
The filth he heaped on my bald head and bottom!
Better tie his tongue up before it runs
Him into a pit.

OREAME: It is for that we have come.
Make for my son the mortar and pestle charm.

OLD MAN: Why, you have yourself full possession
Of the recipe.

OREAME: They say the housewife often has
No stomach for her own broth. Now show me
What physician can cure himself. Indeed, I would
Another served my child the fate before he takes on
His father's foes. (p.43-44)

Oreame takes his grandson to a blacksmith to make a brand new sword for him. She prepares Ozidi for the fight with Azezabife, wakes him up and instructs him to fortify himself by bathing from the pots boiling in the shrine:

OZIDI: (staggering into view and rubbing the sleep off his eyes.)
What, big mother, has day broken already?

OREAME: Shame! Look at the sky
Through the eaves, and hear the drums beating
In the market place!

OZIDI: Then Azezabife is there already?

OREAME: no; he's waiting till you
Get out of bed! Now run, boy, run and bathe
Yourself from the pots boiling in the shrine.
Or shall people of Orua say your bottoms
Suddenly have got stuck to your seat? (p.75).

During the duel, Oreame directs Ozidi to massacre Azezabife who was among the community warriors that murdered the first Ozidi. The deployment of supernatural powers and resources during battles are not peculiar to only men in African traditional societies. In the time past, male warriors could travel to evil forests to fight battles that would bring fame to them and their communities.

Male Warriors and Metaphysical Powers

In this revenge drama, most of the male characters demonstrate the use of traditional medicines, charms and amulets in order to defeat their opponents in the battlefield. Azezabife dismisses the crowd before him and dashed into his shrine in preparation for the perceived war:

Now, who is there? Who is
There hand? Give me my amulets, the snake bangles

About my forearm. Ah! Dada, has your son
Lived to this sunrise to be dipped
In water of cassava by a mere infant?
I must wash off this stain with blood.
Oh, my sword, my sword! I am Azezabife! I
Am Azezabife the Skeleton Man! (p.74).

John Pepper Clark has revealed that Oreame has supernatural powers and even Ofe attests that she has a mirror which helps her in times of troubles. She is a widely known witch in the community of Orua. In commenting on the personality of witches in society, Jayeola-Omoyeni, *et al* (2015) acknowledge Mgbako (2011) who attests that “witches were mean-looking, mean-acting, or otherwise socially disruptive people whose behaviour deviates significantly from cultural or community norms. Nigerians believed that witchcraft was a mystical or supernatural power that caused harm, including death.” The utterances of Ofe about Oreame are captured during his conversation with Ewiri in the play, thus:

OFE: The witch, tell her I am out.
EWIRI: She will not believe that; you forget
She sees everything in that mirror of hers.
OFE: Say I have caught a cold; surely
She ‘ll take pity on a man sick in bed.
EWIRI: Oh yes; she will herself offer you
Instant cure, if only to restore you to full health
For her son to slaughter.
OFE: Is there no safety then for a law-abiding
Man in this state? (p.82)

With the help of Oreame, Ozidi hacks Ofe to death and cuts off his head after several disappearing acts. The medicine man is set for the arrival of Ozidi in the forest, observing, thus: “pots and pots on the boil, seven in all, By count of my ten fingers!” (p.42). In response to Ozidi’s observation, the old man declares:

OLD MAN: That’s the bitter Ijaw truth. These seven pots
Have been on the boil for you for as many days.
THE BOY: You aren’t a cannibal then, are you?
OLD MAN: Twice today have I refilled these pots with water (p.42).

Folktales about fortification of characters and warriors in seven pots or cauldrons abounds in various cultures and societies. Apart from the physical charms and weapons that are taken to battlefields, spiritual beings are sometimes invited to protect and ensure victory of the warriors. In most narratives across African societies, chief priests are saddled with the responsibility of fortifying youths and men before setting off for war. Dickson (2016:219) notes that power is “indispensable in human relations, but the abuse of power can also destroy human relations thereby threatening social order and harmony in society.” the scholar further reveals that “power is human attribute which is demonstrated in man’s ability to accomplish things, to work, to control and to influence others”(220). In dramatic work under study, the spiritual empowerment of the protagonist was carried out by the Old Man but the avenger was led by a powerful woman. Oreame supports her grandson during the revenge battle to defeat the murderers of his late father. With her metaphysical powers of witchcraft, she commanded Azezabife to remain in one spot;

It’s no race
Of the antelope Azezabife:
So stand rooted to one spot! Yes, there,
Like the half splintered tree you are! (79)

The playwright successfully created Oreame as a character with enormous metaphysical powers that surpass those of the male warriors in the dramatic work. The likes of Azezabife, Ofe the short, Agbogidi the Nude, Oguaran the Giant, Sigirisi the Net Man and Akpobrisi the Tree Man are defeated by Ozidi with the spiritual and moral support of her Oreame. The playwright captures the archetypal concept of witchcraft that cuts across all cultures and societies as well as the metaphysical powers which Africans, particularly the Ijaw people strongly believe that they possess in their traditional society.

Conclusion

The playwright has actually demonstrated his artistic skills in recreating the popular epic Ozidi Saga among the Ijaw of Nigeria. The play portrayed the unquantifiable and imaginable role of female gender in their determined effort to enthrone justice in a traditionally male-dominated society. In patriarchal societies, women are seen as passive, appendages and weaker vessels hence male playwrights portrayed them in that light in early dramatic works for several decades. In African dramaturgy, the central stage of literary productions was mainly dominated by patriarchal figures John Pepper Clark has however demonstrated through Ozidi saga that women represented by Oreame possess metaphysical powers and propelling drive for warfare. The deployment of metaphysical powers by the archetypal grandmother of Ozidi the Second helps him to dismantle the dreaded Orua Council of Elders after his spiritual fortification to avenge the gruesome murder of Ozidi. The Council negatively channeled their mental and physical energies by coronating a mentally deficient kinsman, Temugedege as their monarch which set the stage for inveterate hatred, bloodshed and vengeance. The traditional epic dramaturgy presents Ureame, Ozidi's maternal grandmother as psycho-stimulant and propellant, to emerge victorious while his paternal uncle, Temugedege is portrayed as an idiotic, impotent and emasculated character.

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