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Proverb as a Literary Technique in Nigerian Literature and Oral Communication: A Deconstruction of Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*

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Abstract

This is an evaluation of the proverbs in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*. It investigates the significance, implications, framing language and agenda setting functions of the proverbs in the promotion of oral communication in the play and the Nigerian society. Using the thematic descriptive qualitative content analysis (TDQCA), the proverbs are coded by categorising them according to thematic agenda, frames, and sources. Two theories (deconstruction and agenda setting) and two research objectives control the research. The proverbs are further deconstructed to show why the author and the gods are to blame for Odewale's tragedies. Findings show that the play is laced with 77 African proverbs with such narrative frames and thematic agenda as incest, patricide, danger, blame, dramatic irony, identity crisis, causality, leadership quagmire, warning, conflict of interest, and attack. Using the proverbs, Rotimi sets agenda for the audience to enhance oral communication in the play and society. In addition, it is discovered that both the playwright and the gods are to blame for the tragedies in the play. This paper recommends that Nigerian literary artists should frame and set their agenda on relevant contextual and situational proverbs in their works to promote oral communication and Nigerian cultures. Secondly, communication, cultural and literary researchers in Nigeria should engage in the deconstruction of the proverbs in the play to further demonstrate that the playwright (by using proverbs depicting dramatic irony

and predestination) and the gods (by predetermining Odewale's fate) should be blamed for the tragedies in the play.

Keywords: Oral communication, proverbs, deconstruction, framing, agenda setting

Introduction

This paper is not a dismantling of the play but a demonstration that the play-text has already dismantled itself through its flaws, internal contradictions, unjustified title and biased thematic preoccupations. The framing of the proverbs and their agenda setting functions also betray the themes and the title of the play thereby hampering oral communication. Traditionally, proverbs are not mere decorative language in oral communication both in society and the play in which they form a part of the dramatic presentation that highlights the thematic preoccupations - even binary motifs of the play. They are also not for cultural and social communication novices. Proper use of proverbs is a mark of maturity in social interaction, discourse, and mastery of oral communication (Cole, 2019; Angenot, 2024).

Proverbs have been defined by many African literary, social, and cultural communication writers and speakers (Achebe, 2008; Ehondor, 2017; Wenyika, 2024; Travelz, 2025). In fact, there are as many definitions of proverbs as there are writers. For instance, Ehondor (2017) sees proverbs as "sayings or stories intended to assist learning - either formal learning or in informal, family or folk learning". Wenyika (2024) defines proverb as "a short, simple, traditional saying or statement that gives advice based on practical experience, often in the form of a metaphor or allegory". The central idea in these definitions of proverb is its didacticism in literature and oral communication

Oral communication, in this study, refers to the exchange of information, ideas and opinions using spoken words, including verbal and nonverbal cues, to convey meaning and understanding.

In the African traditional setting, oral communication is the only means through which proverbs are used during interpersonal communication, storytelling, social gatherings, moonlight tales, masquerading, cultural dance, and so on.

Although it has its own drawbacks, oral communication promotes and preserves cultural heritage by transmitting values from generation to generation. All the proverbs in the play are passed down from the forebears to the present generation who will then hand them down to the future generations. As elements of oral communication in the play, proverbs are spoken by the characters in their traditional settings such as the palace, farmland, shrine, and the evil forest.

These scenes, in addition to the events that initiate the production of the proverbs, influence the proverbs and their significance. For example, the proverbs uttered by Adetusa and Odewale during their encounter use images that depict that the scene is farmland or bush. Consider the following: “The plant that rivals the opa tree in size is killed by Opa (p.65), “The tree that over reaches the Oriri seeks its own death” (p. 65), “The plant that entwines its branch with the branch of Omoluwere will be entangled by Omoluwere (p.66).

The use of proverbs in Nigerian literature is a ubiquitous practice among Nigerian literary writers, though not all the writers are conversant with local proverbs and their usage. The employment of proverbs in literary works is a way of promoting the indigenous folk culture through literature, language, and oral communication. Proverbs in Nigeria and indeed African literary works are framed to reflect the cultural context of the narrative setting, depict community values and norms. Through framing of proverbs, African writers set agenda on perceived realities and issues in their literary pieces. That is, they present to the audience what they should think about or believe.

The agenda spoken above can appear as a theme, motif, significant point, implication, or inference. The intention is to persuade the audience to think, reason, believe the opinions as well as the contexts of the proverbs. In *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Ola Rotimi frames his proverbs to set agenda on the negative social happenings, lifestyles, experiences, free-will, predestination, and the consequences of actions. Rotimi, through framing and agenda setting, persuades his audience to hold Odewale (and any African native in the same circumstance) responsible for his downfall. To him, the play; Odewale is to blame.

However, this paper takes a different perspective: it deviates from the popular notion of holding Odewale responsible for his errors, sins, and downfall to demonstrating that, since man cannot control or manipulate destiny, the gods themselves should be held responsible for manipulating and exploiting Odewale.

Statement of the Problem

The major problem leading to this study is the dearth of critical evaluations of the proverbs as oral communication media in Ola Rotimi's *The God Are Not to Blame* and African society. There is apparently no scholarly work on this topic or a similar one that has investigated the narrative frames adopted in the proverbs recorded in the play. Similarly, no study has also investigated the agenda setting functions of the proverbs with which the playwright decides what themes and issues he wants the audience to see, discuss, understand, believe, and adopt thereby shaping and influencing public opinions and perceptions.

This work, therefore, deconstructs the entire play and dismantles not only the proverbs employed to support the plot but also the title and the thematic preoccupations. It then approaches the "who-is-to-blame" issue from a different perspective. Exculpating Odewale, this paper finds strong evidence to blame the author and

the gods because the writer uses his social power to build up a plot whose narrative connives with the gods to exploit Odewale's weakness, and then use him as an instrument to fulfill their prophecy.

Objectives of the Study

This research aims to:

(1). Prove that the play is laced with proverbs of various categories revealing their narrative frames and agenda setting functions for effective oral communication.

(2). Deconstruct the proverbs' framing and agenda setting functions for oral communication, and then show how they have proved that the playwright and the play in the process.

Process of Agenda-Setting

Agenda setting is a framework that selects salient events in society and makes them public issues. In the play, there are many salient events depicted in the plot, for instance, patricide, incestuous marriage, consequences of hot temper, identity and crisis, and dramatic irony. Agenda setting determines what should be reported, written, published, and what should be hidden from the public. In doing this, the literary artist may decide not to set an agenda on a complete event. He can also take an aspect of the same story and report it the way he wishes while developing his plot. For instance, Ola Rotimi decides not to directly blame the gods for the tragedies in the play, but he rather overtly demonstrates why Odewale should be blamed for his errors and downfall.

The agenda setting theory is based on two assumptions: first, it is the writer or speaker that controls the reality by shaping and filtering the reality before presenting it to the public. The second assumption is that it is the writer or speaker that attaches salience to an event. Furthermore, the agenda setting theory is a practical display that writers and speakers through their literary works

possess the traditional responsibility to identify and publicise issues, and play a pivotal role in shaping the problems that attract attention from the audience and society (Blanton & Kegley, 2017:507).

In the play, the playwright uses the dramatic irony frame to set agenda on the two key issues in the play - patricide and incest. Again, each proverb has a message to pass. This message (implication, significance, lesson, motif, or theme) is also an agenda because that is what the writer wants the audience to pay attention to.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of deconstruction was developed by Jacques Derrida to demonstrate that no single text has one interpretation. In literary criticism, deconstruction reveals that literary texts expose their own internal contradictions and challenge traditional interpretations. Therefore, what the literary critic does is not to dismantle or demolish the structure of a text but to demonstrate that the text in particular has already dismantled or demolished itself through its inherent internal instability (Miller, 1976; Schwarz, 2016). This simply means that there is binary opposition in every literary text because the text has already undermined its own structure through internal contradictions and inconsistencies.

The play is an example of a literary text that has already dismantled itself through its inherent internal contradictions and ironies. This paper simply exposes this self-destruction. For instance, Ola Rotimi frames his theme of self-will to blame Odewale for his woes, and clears the gods in the process. However, on the contrary, in this study, we move from what the playwright says to what he fails to say. We show that Odewale is simply a victim of fate, divine manipulation, and a mere instrument in the hands of the gods to achieve their purpose without which the gods would have been liars.

Some of the proverbs spoken by the characters support the argument that Odewale is a victim of divine manipulation. For example, he consults Priest before escaping to Kutuje, and Priest threateningly reveals that "to run away would be foolish" (p.60), because "the snail may try but it cannot cast off its shell" (p.60). What is the implication of the agenda the writer sets in the above proverb? The answer is that no human, no matter how he tries, has the ability to control his destiny. Therefore, since the gods have declared that Odewale will kill his father and marry his own mother, he cannot change it, no matter how he struggles to thwart the prophecy. Running away from it is running into it.

Data Presentation

The proverbs are grouped into two categories according to their sources such as **character** and **derivation**. In the play, most of the characters (Odewale, Adetusa, Alaka, Fakunle, Old Man, Aderopo, and Royal Bard) that proficiently and contextually employ proverbs in their speeches are not only adults but also aged. Age and experience therefore enhance the employment of proverbs in oral communication in Africa.

Although age and gray hair may not really connote experience in all cases for wisdom and proficiency in the use of proverbs, yet the importance of age and experience accounts for the reason why in Africa most speakers, before introducing their proverbs, prefer using the sentential prefixes**:** "Our elders say …", or "The elders of my people have a proverb…" For instance, "Our elders say … he who drums for a sick man is himself a sick man" (p.28); "The elders of my people have a proverb: because the farm-owner is slow to catch the thief, the thief calls the farm-owner thief!" (p.46). The prefixes of the foregoing proverbs indicate that African elders are custodians of wisdom, experience and proverbial proficiency. This is why Jansen (2020) equates the death of an aged African

native to the burning down of libraries (Sonubi, 2017; Mobe, 2022).

For our derivation source, we show that African proverbs are derived from sources other than characters playing roles, or speakers in society. These proverbs contain nominal units as key words, such as:
Names of animals (e.g. lion, crocodile, bird, butterfly)**:** "The monkey and gorilla may claim oneness but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla" (p.48); "Can the cockroach be innocent in a gathering of fowls?" (p.51). Odewale sees himself as an unwanted stranger among Kutuje natives.

Human agency (e.g. man, people, seer, farm-owner)**:** Some examples are "The ruin of a land and its peoples begins in their homes" (p.13); and "It is sickness that man can cure, not death" (p.12). The first proverb is framed with disaster, calamity, and insecurity. Odewale explains that social problems or conflicts often originate from within the family, and then spreads to the entire community. The epidemic that engulfs Kutuje begins from their homes and then spreads to the entire community. In the second proverb, King Odewale implores Townspeople to act fast and take care of their health using herbal remedies and stop leaving everything to him. Self help is better than self death.

Body parts (e.g. teeth, eye, head)**:** "When the wood-insect gathers sticks, on its own head it carries them" (p.72). In this proverb, King Odewale blames himself for his downfall and, therefore, claims he deserves the poetic justice that follows. This proverb contains social responsibility, accountability, and causality frames. "The horns cannot be too heavy for the head of the cow that must bear them" (p.20). In this proverb, Ojuola suspects that Aderopo, having returned from the Ifa oracle, tries to conceal the revelation from the gods about the cause of the problem in the land. Ojuola believes that there is no need withholding the message because no

matter how bad it may sound, it must be well received. Fitness, admition of responsibility, and doggedness are the frames in this proverb. Let us also look at "until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution" (p.21). Here, Aderopo throws his hearers, including King Odewale, into cliffhanger. The proverb suggests that the natives should be very careful how they interact with others, pending when the bad egg is fished out from among them. The frames of caution and watchfulness are expressed here. Furthermore, "a chicken eats corn, drinks water, swallows pebbles, yet she complains of having no teeth …" (p.26). Using this proverb, Odewale eulogises Baba Fakunle, a seer. Though blind, Fakunle "sees" and does what many people with physical eyes cannot see and do. The frames and agenda of mystery, unequalled ability and spiritual endowment are expressed in the proverb.

Nature (e.g. rain, dew, moon, air, tree, river)**:** We are told that "a bush does not sway this way or that way, unless there is wind" (p.60). Secondly, "the mangrove tree dwells in the river, but does that make it a crocodile?" (p.51). Finally, "you think that you can uproot a tree that has been planted by the gods" (p.32). What agenda does the first proverb set for the audience? Africans believe that there is nothing that happens without a reason (Apologun, 2020). There is a cause for the calamity in Kutuje. There is a reason for Old Man's reference to Odewale that "the butterfly thinks himself a bird" (p.59). In the second proverb, Odewale sees himself as a stranger from Ijekun, who dwells and rules in the midst of his enemies. Ojuola finds it hard to convince him that "you have dwelled among us long enough, my lord, to be one of us". It is Odewale's refutation of Ojuola's assertive speech that leads to his proverb. In the third proverb, Odewale wrongly sees Aderopo as a political opponent that cannot unseat him.

Domestic items (e.g. bucket, basket, cooking pot, calabash, etc)**:** "Two parts of the same calabash split equal by the gods …" (p.38). In this aphorism, Royal Bard refers to Odewale and Ojuola as a

good match cleaved together by the gods. The proverb "Two rams cannot drink from the same bucket at the same time! They will lock horns" (p.34) is framed with rivalry with political undertone. Odewale sees Aderopo as his rival to the throne. "Mortar and pestle say you must bow countless times to power" (p.48); "The basket says you must tremble when you see me" (p.48); "The grinding stone says you must kneel to my power" (p.48). The scene of the foregoing proverbs is farmland. King Adetusa and his son (Odewale) have a deadly encounter in which King Adetusa sees himself as "mortar", "pestle", and "grinding stone". Therefore, Odewale must succumb. Politics, power challenge, and conflict of interest are the frames and agenda setting functions expressed in the last three proverbs.

The gods (e.g. Ogun, Sango, Obatala): Consider these two proverbs: "When an evil plotter beats his drum for the downfall of the innocent, the gods will not let that drum sound!" (p.30); and "You think that you can uproot a tree that has been planted by the gods" (p.32). Odewale sees Aderopo as his rival to Kutuje throne. Therefore, he unduly suspects that Aderopo plans evil against him for usurpation. The agenda setting function and frames of baseless suspicion and impossibility of action execution are portrayed.

Abstract ideas (e.g. joy, sickness, death):
We present two proverbs that contain abstract ideas: "It is sickness that man can cure, not death" (p.12); and "But joy has a slender body that breaks too soon" (p.8). Firstly, King Odewale implores Townspeople to act fast and take care of their health using herbal remedies and stop leaving everything to him. Secondly, he delivers Kutuje from the ethnic cleansing planned by Ikolu. This brings peace and joy in the land. Now, the sickness in every home has killed the joy thereby exposing the fragility and ephemerality of euphoria.

There are yet other narrative frames and agendas (themes) expressed in the proverbs as demonstrated in the themes below: **Origin and identity crisis**: "The mangrove tree dwells in the river, but does that make it a crocodile?" (p. 50); "The monkey and gorilla may claim oneness but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla" (p.50); "The butterfly thinks himself a bird" (p.59). **Warning**: "Take your time, child, if you rise too early the dew of life will soak you" (p. 35). **Threat**: "... if you rise too early the dew of life will soak you" (p.35).

Importance of thinking before acting: "Take your time, child, if you rise too early the dew of life will soak you" (p. 35). **Skill and expertise**: "Kolanut lasts longer in the mouths of them who value it" (p. 7). **Caution**: "When the frog in front falls into a pit, others behind take caution" (p.23). **Enquiry**: "When crocodiles eat their own eggs, what will they not do to the flesh of a frog"? (p.23). **Conflict**: "Two rams cannot drink from the same bucket at the same time! They will lock horns" (p.34); "The grinding stone says you must kneel to my power" (p.48). **Futility and Impossibility of action**: "The snail may try but it cannot cast off its shell" (p.60); "The lion's liver is vain wish for dogs" (p.37).

Reward for patience and endurance: "The moon moves slowly but by daybreak it crosses the sky" (p.14). **Perseverance:** "By trying often, the monkey learns to jump from tree to tree without falling" (p.14). **Equality and equity**: "Two parts of the same calabash split equal by the gods …" (p.38). **Philosophical truths**: "The struggles of man begin at birth" (p. 1); "The ruin of a land and its peoples begins in their homes" (p.13). **Fake life, Camouflage and Secrec**y: "All lizards lie prostrate: how can a man tell which lizard suffers from bellyache?" (p.23).

Actions and Consequences: "When the wood-insect gathers sticks, on its own head it carries them" (p.72); "He who pelts another with pebbles asks for rocks in return" (p. 7). **The Danger**

of procrastination: "...because the farm-owner is slow to catch the thief, the thief calls the farm-owner thief!" (p.46).

Discussions

The above language frames, tones and themes of the proverbs are highly significant. For instance, they create room for smooth dialogue, audience engagement and activity, convey meaning, mood and attitude, induce flexibility in narration, enhance free and easy transition, help to connect stories and holding them together in narratively cohesive unity. Other communicative, linguistic and narrative functions of the proverbs in the play includes sentential function (Proverbs are usually sentences rendering full meanings); they are agents of plot development; they are means of literary and cultural expressions in the oral dialogue; they enhance the contextual meanings of other words and expresions around them.

Furthermore, the proverbs in the play also paint true picture of the circumstances, settings, and scenes under which they are used. For example, the farm scene, the shrine, the palace, etc, have proverbs relevant to them revealing the place of action. Finally, they aid the playwright to set his agenda and frame his thematic preoccupations making perceived realities salient.

What are the bases for the deconstruction of the proverbs in the play? In our analysis, we deviate from the general notion, frames, and the motif that Odewale is the architect of his downfall. We rather show that both the playwright and the gods are to blame for Odewale's tragedies. In addition, this paper also exposes those proverbs that introduce irony and contradiction into the play thereby destroying the long-acclaimed notion that the play. Finally, our analysis of relevant proverbs highlights the theme of predestination while dismantling those proverbs that support the theme of self-will.

Ola Rotimi is the first on our blame-list. His introduction of dramatic irony and use of confusing proverbs is the beginning of Odewale's errors and consequential downfall. This puffery hampers oral communication leading to Odewale's confusion. Common sense shows that nobody under dramatic irony is conscious of his actions. Rewrite the manuscript and remove dramatic irony, if other factors are equal, you will see Odewale becoming fully conscious of his actions. In like manner, the use of proverbs in society should be done with caution.

So, it is Rotimi's dramatic irony and wrong application of proverbs that push Odewale to his doom, not his tragic flaw of excessive anger as generally alleged. The fact is that hot temper may push a sane man into committing patricide but not to the extent of marrying his own mother. Therefore, if Odewale kills his father out of hot temper, is it the same hot temper that makes him marry his own mother? No. The answer is dramatic irony. It is this dramatic flaw that also encourages the introduction of the proverbs that promote Rotimi's dramatic plot. Rotimi sometimes employs the proverbs to convey the opposite of their intended meanings, creating a sense of dramatic irony or reversing the audience's hopes and expectations. The case below explains this assertion better:

The encounter between Odewale and Adetusa at Ede farm would have been averted if both father and son know each other. This knowledge would have averted Adetusa's aggressive and unfriendly approach as well as Odewale's killing of his father out of anger. However, in a bid to achieve a dramatic effect through irony, Rotimi hides this awareness from father and son to help the gods achieve their aim. He rather employs the proverbs that expose this dramatic irony. For instance, "When crocodiles eat their own eggs, what will they not do to the flesh of a frog*?" (*p.23). Here, Odewale does not know that he is the crocodile that eats its own eggs by killing his father and marrying his mother; "The mangrove

tree dwells in the river, but does that make it a crocodile*?"* (p. 50). This proverb reveals that Odewale believes he is a stranger in Kutuje without knowing that he is the first citizen of the community. This arrangement exposes Rotimi's plot development intent and his potential biases.

Furthermore, the idea of a new king inheriting both the throne and the queen is another dramatic arrangement Rotimi initiates to build up his plot towards actualising his thematic intent. An outsider or a relative of the late husband inheriting the crown and the queen may be considered normal in Africa, but not the widow's direct blood like Odewale. Assuming that Odewale does not show up, and it falls on Aderopo to inherit the throne as the only heir apparent, what will happen to Ojuola? Will Aderopo marry her too? This aspect of Kutuje tradition is neither a Yoruba culture nor African way of life.

In addition, Rotimi's thematic preoccupations of hubris, harmatia, self will, free will, and free choice geared towards excusing the gods are dismantled by the alternative binary theme of predestination. Predestination is a belief that whatever that happens to man has been preordained or fated by the gods, and that man is simply a medium through which destiny interplays with man's activities. Adedeji (2022) confirms that "Odewale is cursed from birth by the gods to kill his father and marry his mother*"*. In predestination, man has no control over his destiny or fate. Whatever he does will certainly accelerate his life's journey to fulfilling his destiny. Odewale visits Priest who reveals that "you have a curse on you, son" (p.60). When Odewale wants to know what to do to avert this ugly prophecy, Priest tells him that "it has been willed" by the gods, so "nothing will be done about it" (p. 60).

Going further, Priest reiterates: "You cannot run away from it. The gods have willed that you will kill your father, and then marry your

mother!" To prove that it is not Odewale's intention to kill Adetusa and marry Ojuola, he demands to know what he should do to nip the atrocities in the bud. The Oracle says that "nothing" will be done because "it has been willed". The proverb that paints the clear picture of predestination is that "the snail may try but it cannot cast off its shell*"* (p.60). Here, Priest explains the futility that must greet Odewale if he tries to run away from his destiny, or goes searching for solutions. To Odewale, his escape from Ijekun is to avert killing Ogundele, the man he wrongly thinks is his biological father, and to abort marrying Ogundele's wife, the woman he wrongly believes is his mother. Destiny finally brings him to the farm, the right place to execute the patricide, and to the palace to carry out the incestuous connubiality as ordained by the gods.

Having blamed Ola Rotimi for creating the enabling environment for Odewale's tragedies through the technique of dramatic irony, let us now turn to the gods to prove that they, too, are to blame. Consider the following proverbs that demonstrate the inherent ironic contradictions and flaws in the plot as well as show that the gods should be held responsible for the tragedies in the drama: **"When an evil plotter beats his drum for the downfall of the innocent, the gods will not let that drum sound!" (p.30)**. Does this evil plotting also include a situation where the gods are the real evil plotters, and beating their evil drums "for the downfall of the innocent"? The fact is that the gods are the real evil plotters in the play, not Aderopo or the chiefs, as Odewale misunderstands. The drum of the gods sounds the loudest against Odewale. They drum for Odewale's calamities from his birth to self banishment.

When Adetusa and Ojuola visit the oracle to know the destiny "the child has brought as duty to this earth from the gods" (p.2), the oracle reveals that "this boy, he will kill his own father and marry his own mother" (p. 3). Indeed, Narrator confirms that "the future is not happy*"* (p 3). To stop this prophecy, the same gods order

that the boy should be killed in the evil forest. In the forest, the gods stop the killing by causing Gbonka to have pity on the child so that he will not kill the baby. The same gods arrange for the appearance of Ogundele, the childless hunter, and Alaka, his servant. Out of pity (an endowment from the gods), Gbonka delivers the baby to Ogundele and Alaka. The gods have saved the baby now, so that he will execute their abominable projects in future.

When Odewale runs away from Ijekun, the all-knowing and all-scheming gods direct his way to Kutuje to fulfill their prophecy. What a plot by the gods! In the farm, through divine arrangement by the gods, they bring Odewale and Adetusa together over land dispute. With his hot temper from Sango, and the hoe from Ogun, Odewale (empowered by the gods) strikes Adetusa to death. Therefore, the hoe and the hot temper are instruments in the hand of Odewale while Odewale is an instrument in the hands of the gods. This implies that Odewale, the hoe, and his hot-temper are all instruments in the hands of the gods. This divine plot and the hand of fate finally lead to Odewale's killing of Adetusa, his marriage to his mother, Ojuola's suicide, and Odewale's self exile.

The above reveals that the gods are the real evil plotters and executors of evil plots beating their drums of doom against the helpless mortals. In order words, Aderopo, Fakunle, and the Chiefs are all innocent of Odewale's allegations and accusations of evil plots against him. He should rather direct his blame to the gods. However, to my chagrin, Odewale, through Rotimi's theatrical arrangement, ignorantly warns the audience to “let no one blame the powers …” (p.71). He continues: “The powers would have failed if I did not let them use me”. The fact is that he does not let the gods use him, but they rather exploit his hot temper, a “gift” from them, because “they knew my weakness” (p.71), and then influence him to execute their project.

Another ironic contradiction is contained in the interrogative proverb: **"you think that you can uproot a tree that has been planted by the gods"? (p.32).** Odewale's suspicion of Aderopo is baseless and unfounded. It is the gods that "plant" (install) and "uproot" (remove) "trees" (kings). They plant and uproot Adetusa and Odewale - the trees (kings) they (the gods) have planted. It is both ironic and contradictory that the gods will enthrone and dethrone someone and they will still go ahead to allow the transfer of guilt to and suspicion of another.

In this proverb, we can see the frames and agenda of dishonesty, double-dealing, betrayal of trust, wickedness, and contradictions. This is because to ensure that they see their prophecy fulfilled, the gods install Adetusa and Odewale, use the latter to kill the former and, finally, disgrace and banish Odewale out of the palace, so that, in their self-defense, the gods will not be liars. However, the execution of the atrocities in the play has already defined the gods as atrocious.

With the above analysis, we boldly draw an inference that since the gods have destined the path Odewale should tread on, he simply follows their dictates and, therefore, they will be praised for Odewale's strengths and blamed for his weaknesses. Finally, the gods are to blame for Odewale's weaknesses that climax to his tragic end. Secondly, in our social interaction and oral communication which involves the use of proverbs, we should be careful not to employ proverbs that will blame the innocent and set the guilty free.

Obatala is the god of creation who does not only create human beings but also endows them with character traits and patterns of behaviour. Based on this reason, Odewale's hot temper should be blamed on the gods who freely endow him with such choleric temperament. Odewale confirms that nobody teaches him to be hot-tempered except "Sango, the thunder lion, taught me that one!"

(p.44). This is why Alaka nicknames him "scorpion! One that must not be vexed. Smooth on the surface like a woman's jewel, poison at the tail…" (p.43). It is the same uncontrollable anger from the gods that pushes Odewale to kill Adetusa with the hoe, a symbol of Ogun, the god of iron and thunder. We therefore argue that Ogun is the killer of Adetusa. Odewale is a mere instrument in the hands of the gods and he also has the instrument of the gods (the hoe) in his hand: "let your blood flow, Ogun … I have used your weapon" (pp.48-49).

From the foregoing, we can infer that Obatala, Sango, and Ogun connively unite to agonise and disorganise the life of Odewale, a mere helpless mortal. How have they achieved this? Obatala (the creator) creates Odewale; Sango (the trait imposer) endows him with hot temper; and Ogun (the iron and weapon god), provides Odewale with a weapon (i.e. hoe) that kills Adetusa.

Conclusion

This paper has revealed the significance and relevance of proverbs in the promotion of oral communication for the development of the plot of *The Gods Are Not to Blame* and the entire traditional African society. It also shows that there are seventy-seven proverbs in the play, and these proverbs contextually improve the quality of the plot, the dialogue and the actions. In addition, the playwright frames the proverbs to set agenda on the thematic preoccupations such as patricide, incestuous marriage, politics, suspicion, identity crisis, free-will, and predestination. Finally, the proverbs are also deconstructed to demonstrate why the title of the drama should be altered as well as why the playwright and the gods should be blamed for Odewale's errors, his downfall, his incestuous marriage to his mother, and other tragedies in the play.

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