



A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of the Tropes of (Sexually) Objectified or/and Oppressed Men in Selected Contemporary African Prose Works

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Abstract

*This paper examines the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed men in selected contemporary African prose works. Drawing on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, FCDA) for theoretical underpinnings, Systemic Functional Linguistics (henceforth, SFL) for grammatical tools and the qualitative research method, this study seeks to analyze how contemporary feminist writers like Amma Darko, Daniel Mengara, and Lola Shoneyin employ language in their fictional texts *The Housemaid* (1998), *Mema* (2003) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015) respectively to represent the phenomenon of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed male characters. This article cogently argues that the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed men, as enacted in the aforementioned prose works, encode a form of gendered experience which irrefutably has a given recondit function or meaning which only a critical linguistic analysis of the writers' language can uncover. The findings reveal that the three authors intentionally use language to depict their male personae as (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed individuals with a view to challenging the established social order in social life and establishing a certain balance in the representation of gender or/and power relations in African literature.*

Introduction

Whilst the term "Objectification" was initially used to discuss the gendered experience of/between the two sex categories- male and female (see Immanuel Kant's Lectures on Ethics (1997) for more details) in social life, Objectification Theory (henceforth OT) (formalized and proposed by Fredrickson & Roberts, (1997) has been repeatedly employed in recent works in (Counseling) Psychology (see Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr, 2011, for example) and Gender and Media Studies (see Balraj, 2015, for instance) to exclusively account for such women-related issues as female sexual objectification, female self-objectification, female discrimination, female commodification, domestic violence, rape, gender inequality, unequal power relations, etc., and their adverse consequences on girls' and women's (mental and physical) health, perception and behavior. In this perspective, Szymanski, Moffitt & Carr (2011) claim that "Objectification theory provides an important framework for understanding, researching, and intervening to improve women's lives in a sociocultural context that sexually objectifies the female body and equates a woman's worth with her body's appearance and sexual functions." Endorsing the foregoing, Calogero (in Cash, 2012) submits that "Objectification theory attempts to explain the extreme and pervasive tendency to equate [girls and] women with their

bodies and why this can have such negative consequences for [girls' and] women's body image and beyond.”

Underlying OT is the assumption that patriarchal culture is pervasive in society and sexually objectifies the female body or gender alone. The question that this theoretical assumption raises is whether or not boys and men are or can equally be (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed as girls and women in a patriarchal context. A fairly large body of recent research on gender or/and power relations in contemporary African literature actually evidences that the male body or gender is or can be prone to objectification or/and oppression too. However, there is still need for an in-depth research to gain an insight into the various discursive or/and linguistic and non-linguistic resources or/and strategies contemporary African writers draw on to represent the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed male individuals in contemporary African literature (and by extension in society) as well as the authorial ideologies or/and intentions undergirding this gendered representation.

The current study completely breaks away from the underlying theoretical assumption of OT. In other words, it cogently challenges the view that holds that only the female body or gender is or can be sexually objectified or/and oppressed in a patriarchal setting. It then goes on from there to propose a critical linguistic reading of literature which considers objectification or an objectifying act or treatment as a gendered experience or as a performative act (Butler, 1988; 1990/1999). It takes the view, so to speak, that the male body or gender, like the female one, is or can be sexually objectified or/and oppressed in social life. To prove this view, the paper selects and examines three main contemporary prose works, namely: Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* (1998), Daniel Mengara's *Mema* (2003) and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015). It draws its theoretical underpinnings from Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, FCDA).

Theoretical Framework

As stated earlier on, this paper draws its theoretical insights from FCDA. FCDA is actually a recent development under the broader branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth, CDA) (Lehtonen, 2007). It brings together two distinct but complementary fields, namely: CDA and feminist (language) studies (Lazar, 2005; 2007). By combining these two disciplines, the utmost aim is “[...] to advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in discourse in sustaining a (hierarchically) gendered social order.” (Lazar, 2005). In other words, “The aim of feminist critical discourse studies, [...], is to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities.” (Lazar, 2007).

From a feminist perspective, patriarchal society is claimed to be organized along gender lines, and that this social organization empowers men at the expense of women. This is to say, for instance, that only men are discursively or/and socio-culturally enabled in a patriarchal setting to dominate, (ab-)use and objectify or/and oppress their female counterparts. This is actually the fundamental theoretical assumption surreptitiously held by proponents of OT (see Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997, for example). This theoretical assumption, as recent research on gender or/and power relations in contemporary African literature documents (see Koussouhon, Akogbéto & Allagbé, 2015a & b; Allagbé & Allagbé, 2015; Houndjo & Allagbé, 2018; Allagbé & Amoussou, 2018; Allagbé & Amoussou 2020a & b; Amoussou & Djimet, 2020, Allagbé, Zossoungbo & Alou 2020, Allagbé, Amoussou & M'po, 2021, for instance), is not always true in all patriarchal contexts.

While the aforementioned recent research works on gender or/and power relations in contemporary African literature document the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed men, they actually do so sporadically or/and fail to demonstrate systematically and intertextually how language serves to enact the gendered experience of male objectification or/and oppression or female-dominance and power over the male body or gender. If one considers objectification or an objectifying act or treatment as a gendered experience or as a performative act (Butler, 1988; 1990/1999), this implies thus that one naturally admits the agency of the individuals (male and female alike) involved in the gendered experience or performative act as well as the roles and values/attributes they take on in the enactment of that experience or act. In contrast, when OT takes as a starting point that patriarchal culture is pervasive in society and sexually objectifies girls and women, it systematically and consciously eschews their right to agency in discourse. This is to say, from the perspective of OT, in discourse, girls and women cannot act upon but can only be acted upon. Given this observation, one can easily suggest that “[...] objectification theory does not seek to delineate the causes of the objectification of [girls and] women [in social life]. Rather, it seeks to elucidate the range of intra-individual psychological consequences for girls and women that result from viewing oneself primarily as a body, and the potential mechanisms by which this chain of events might occur.” (Calogero in Cash, 2012)

Methods

As mentioned in the previous section, this paper draws its theoretical underpinnings from FCDA (Lazar, 2005; 2007). Underlying FCDA is the view that discourse constitutes the use of language, constructs social reality, enables as well as constrains agency. This article also borrows its grammatical tools from SFL (Eggins, 2004; Halliday & Webster, 2009; Fontaine, 2013). SFL views and treats language as a system of signs from which people make or can make choices to realize three simultaneous kinds of meaning or function: ideational, interpersonal and textual (Halliday & Webster, 2009). It is also considered as a linguistic theory that views and examines “language as shaped (even in its grammar) by the social functions it has come to serve” (Wodak, 2009, p. 27). In addition, this study draws on the qualitative research method which consists in selecting, analyzing and discussing texts or/and language data in non-numerical and non-statistical terms.

In connection to the foregoing, this article examines the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed men in selected contemporary African prose works. In other words, this study seeks to analyze how contemporary feminist writers like Amma Darko, Daniel Mengara, Lola Shoneyin and employ language in their fictional texts *The Housemaid* (1998), *Mema* (2003) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015) respectively to represent the phenomenon of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed male characters. This paper cogently argues that the tropes of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed men, as enacted in the aforementioned prose works, encodes a form of gendered experience which irrefutably has a given recondite function or meaning which only a critical linguistic analysis of the writers' language can uncover.

The first and third novels under study were actually written by female writers from English-speaking countries (Ghana [Darko] and Nigeria [Shoneyin]) but the second one was written by a male writer from a French-speaking country (Gabon [Mengara]). Indeed, the choice of these writers and their prose works stems from the social or/and political engagement characteristic of and noticeable in their prose works, in general, and in their selected prose works under scrutiny, in particular. These writers seem to have a similar social or/and political agenda which is obvious in their representation of social reality with regard to gender, power and ideology. Simply put, these authors seem to depict social reality in their prose works, encapsulating it in a deflationary or derogatory language and a range of multimodal subversive or/and

disarticulating themes markedly meant to realize what Fowler (1986, p. 31) rightly terms *defamiliarization*, which means ‘making strange’.

Results and Discussion

A Qualitative Analysis of the Tropes of (Sexually) Objectified or/and Oppressed Men in the Selected Novels

As implied thus far, the three novels *The Housemaid* (1998) (henceforth, *TH*), *Mema* (2003) (henceforth, *M*) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015) (henceforth, *TSL*) under study are set in patriarchal contexts. As mentioned earlier, patriarchal culture is assumed (by proponents of OT) to be pervasive in society and sexually objectify the female body or gender alone. This study aims to challenge this theoretical assumption by demonstrating systematically and inter-textually how the language of the aforementioned literary texts represents male characters as (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed individuals. In *TH*, for instance, two female characters, Madam Sekyiwa and Tika, her daughter, are highly reputed for the objectifying or/and oppressing treatments they mete out to the men in their lives.

Madam Sekyiwa, described as a “100 per cent illiterate” (Darko, 1998, p. 18) in the second chapter of the novel, clandestinely dates a self-actualized married man who is twenty-four years older than she is. This man’s wife is reported to be barren as a result of an abortion they have had earlier on in their courting days. Sekyiwa later gets pregnant for the man. He subsequently decides to quit his wife and settle down with Sekyiwa with a view to taking a very good care of her and their unborn baby. He recounts this in the subsequent passage: “‘I will live the rest of life for you and our child,’ [...], you can take care of me and our child.’ (ibid.). As it clearly appears in the foregoing text, the man uses the epistemic modal operators ‘will’ (‘will live’; ‘will set’; ‘will make’ and ‘will invest’) and ‘can’ (‘can take care of...’) five times in his talk. According to Fontaine (2013), epistemic modality, also called modalization in SFL terms, indicates a kind of connotative meaning relating to the degree of certainty the narrator/speaker/writer wants to express about what s/he is saying or the estimation of probability associated to what is being said. In connection to the preceding claim, one can simply infer that the man’s exclusively recursive use of epistemic modality in the text above denotes strong desire, good faith, promise, certainty and ability. This suggests that the man is very sure of keeping his promise of making Sekyiwa a successful businesswoman in that he has the financial capacity to do so. In fact, he keeps his promise. When Sekyiwa is finally established in business, she feels that she now has the social and economic power to rule and engineer her own life. In her attempts to live her life the way she wants, she makes her male counterpart’s life unbearable and hellish.

In actual fact, when Sekyiwa becomes rich, she scorns and disrespects her husband. Consider how she treats her husband when the latter mistakenly interprets the sign of life’s satisfaction on her face for love in the subsequent text: “He [Sekyiwa’s husband] took her in his arms. ‘Now that we have achieved what we set out to,’ he looked her tenderly in the eyes,’ ‘we can begin to really enjoy life.’ But to his dismay, Sekyiwa gave him a scornful jeer. ‘Enjoy what life? What life is there to enjoy with a dead penis?’” (Darko, 1998). As it appears in the preceding depiction, Sekyiwa’s response to her husband is made up of two interrogative clauses: one echo question (Enjoy what life?) and one non-echo question (What life is there to enjoy with a dead penis?). Sekyiwa’s echo question actually echoes and questions what her husband has said previously. This denotes surprise and contempt somehow. Her non-echo question overtly encodes contempt for her husband in that it contains the condescending or deflationary phrase ‘with a dead penis’. The condescending phrase implies erectile problem or penile numbness.

Though the root-cause of the man's penile numbness is not explicitly mentioned in the text, one can simply suggest that it is caused by ageing, not by diseases. Given the age difference of twenty-four years existing between Sekyiwa and her husband, it is certain that the latter can no longer satisfy her sexually. For this reason, Sekyiwa goes on to cheat on him with "Young, good-looking male gold-diggers"; "She gave them good money; they gave her good sex." (Darko, 1998). From this gender portrayal, it is obvious that a man (who has from time immemorial been (represented as) a sexist exploiter or sexual oppressor *per excellence*) is helplessly exploited or/and oppressed by a woman. It is also obvious in this portrayal that the male body or gender is treated in this context by a woman as a mere sexual object or sex toy which one can buy, use and dump at will to satisfy one's sexual desires. In other words, the male body or gender is sexually objectified by a woman.

Furthermore, as Sekyiwa, by means of banknotes, copiously gets her sexual desires satisfied outside her marital home, she no longer has any consideration for her husband. When the man feels scornfully belittled, downgraded and deflated by his objectifying, exploiting and oppressing wife, he attempts to discursively regain his lost masculinity or male identity, which consequently results in repeated squabbles between him and his wife. In these squabbles, he is helplessly and repeatedly battered by Sekyiwa, his wife. This inflicts a long-lasting moral, psychological and physical trauma and pain on the man. In this state, it is obvious that the man might suffer from one or more than one of the following psychological abnormalities, namely: low self-esteem, fear of intimacy, fear of abandonment and fear of betrayal (Pourya, 2014). The foregoing observation clearly indicates that the male body or gender undergoes domestic violence in the hands of a woman, and as such, it serves as a site for the inscription and expression of female-dominance and power. Below the heterodiegetic narrator plainly relates this unbelievable but true gendered experience of female-dominance and oppression of a man in a patriarchal context: "Little Tika remembered the fights and arguments she had witnessed between her parents. [...]. He had cuddled her, managed a weak smile and assured her that he had not been crying, but she knew that he was not telling her the truth." (Darko, 1998).

In the text above, the heterodiegetic narrator deliberately uses four nominalized verbs or what Halliday (in Halliday and Webster, 2009) technically terms *grammatical metaphors* ('screaming' and 'yelling', 'imploring' and 'pleading') to encode unequal power relations between Sekyiwa and her husband. Interestingly, while the use of the first two grammatical metaphors encodes an entrenched power abuse, sexist exploitation and oppression exercised by a woman on a man, that of the remaining two metaphors denotes male humiliation, subservience and powerlessness. In addition, while the narrator uses the figurative expression '[...] mother's flying hands at [...] father's face in time with her insults' to further reinforce female-dominance, sexist exploitation and oppression in the text, she employs the predicated theme in: 'It (Theme) was her father (Rheme) who (Theme) had wept (Rheme)' to further emphasize male humiliation, subservience, and shattering therein. In effect, this predicated version contrasts with the original version: 'Her father (Theme) had wept (Rheme)'. Theme predication, according to Eggins (2004) is a process whereby the Subject of the original clause is made Rheme in the predicated version. This process is used when the writer/speaker/narrator wishes to give emphasis to a constituent that would otherwise be unemphasized, while maintaining the "real" news, which is in the Rheme of the original clause.

Again, the narrator's use of the behavioral processes 'had wept', 'was weeping', 'managed a weak smile', and 'had not been crying' with regard to the man (the Behavior) is evocative of a symbolic picture or/and pictorial trope in the text wherein the man (or the male body or gender) is physiologically and psychologically fragmented and disarticulated. In other words, the identified behavioral processes induce that the man is utterly shattered and overwhelmed as a

result of the repeated objectifying or/and oppressive acts that he suffers in the hands of his wife. Unfortunately, this man does not withstand this for a long time in that he passes away shortly (Darko, 1998). The foregoing plainly denotes the trope of man as an enemy (Koussouhon, Akogbéto & Allagbé, 2015b). Interestingly enough, the trope of man as an enemy is inter-textually found in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). This trope is actually encoded in Mama (Mrs. Beatrice Achike). She is depicted as someone who utterly depends on her husband, Papa (Mr. Eugene Achike), a very harsh and tyrannical man/husband/father, for her survival. As a result of her total dependence, Mama repeatedly undergoes domestic violence in the hands of this man, but one day she makes up her mind to free herself (and her children: Jaja and Kambili) from his tyranny by poisoning him. After eliminating her husband physically, Mama does not seem to regret her loathsome and heinous act. This is markedly noticed in her narration of what happens to her children: "They did an autopsy", she said. "They have found the poison in your father's body"

Tika, like her mother, objectifies, exploits and oppresses men. It must be noted that Tika, unlike her mother, is fairly educated in that she has completed her fifth-form secondary education (Darko, 1998). While in school, Tika falls in love with one of her male classmates, Owuraku, both are eighteen years old then. Given her failure in her exams, she drops out of school to do business while her lover continues with his studies. When Owuraku finishes the sixth-form and goes on to university, Tika has already become a successful business tycoon. Consequently, she regularly provides for all his needs (p. 22). The preceding representation encodes the trope of male dependence. Astonishingly, the trope of male dependence inter-textually runs in Darko's three other novels: *Beyond The Horizon* (1995) (henceforth *BTH*), *Faceless* (2003) (henceforth *F*) and *Not Without Flowers* (2007) (henceforth *NWF*).

In *BTH*, for instance, Akobi Ajaman (Cobby), Mara's husband, is described as someone who squarely depends, for his survival, on the incomes she gets from throwing people's rubbish away for them, in Ghana (Darko, 1995, p. 11) and later from her work as a maid (pp. 108-109) and selling of her body first of all in Pee's (Pompey's) brothel and afterwards in Oves' brothel (pp. 115-140), in Germany. In *F*, Nii Kpakpo, Maa Tsuru's second husband, is also depicted as someone who ravenously feeds on the incomes of his stepdaughter called Baby T (whom in connivance with his wife he places in Maami Broni to work for her as a housemaid but Maami Broni uses the little girl for prostitution) (Darko, 2003, pp. 140-141). Again, in *NFW*, Idan, Aggie's husband, is portrayed as someone who is dependent on his girlfriend Aggie, in their university days, for his survival. Then, as the narrator relates, "[...] he used to be the poor and needy one, and Aggie was the generous provider" (Darko, 2007). This gender portrayal somewhat denotes the trope of female empowerment and male disempowerment (Allagbé & Amoussou 2020b).

One must bear in mind here that Tika pays heavily for her success in business, including her dignity: "Obsessed with proving her success in spite of her academic failure to Owuraku, Tika invested all in business- her brains, her energies, her dignity." (Darko, 1998). The foregoing depiction suggests that Tika deliberately chooses to curtail or compromise her moral standards or/and ethical values in order to make it in business. In this sense, there can never be limits to her behavior and perspective. That's why she cheats on her lover without any remorse whatsoever. To prove that Tika truly knows what she is doing, consider how she reacts to Owuraku's query about her bedding other men: 'What is this ugly talk about you bedding them all? Shop owners, bank managers, customs officers?' He thought Tika would break down and beg for forgiveness. Instead she snapped defensively, 'Do I poke my nose into your studying methods?' While the aforementioned delineation exudes that Tika is not regretful of her act (which exudes female arrogance and disdain which undeniably will leave Owuraku morally or

psychologically hurt and make him unquestionably feel exploited and humiliated), the full polar interrogative or yes/no question ('Do I poke my nose into your studying methods?') she poses her lover is suggestive of the fact that bedding other men, in a business context, is not a big deal; i.e., in her perspective, it is, as presupposed by the group of words '[your] studying methods', 'a business method' or a requirement to succeed in business.

The yes/no question she also asks Owuraku clearly suggests that she is somewhat consenting to this social sexist practice. But her being consenting to this practice does not discursively presuppose that she lacks agency or she is completely constrained socio-culturally into accepting it against her will. The fact is that she intentionally chooses to use or exploit this practice (and its male perpetrators) to her benefits. In the novel, apart from Owuraku, Tika is said to have willingly decided to settle on four useful 'steady' lovers, all of whom actually have a utility value for her:

Samuel, the son of an apostolic pastor, was her customs officer on the Ghana-Togo border. Riad, the half-caste, was a shop owner with several outlets. And through Eric, the struggling musician, she remained on the favoured customers list of the commercial bank headed by his older brother. But it was Mr Attui, the factory owner, who helped her get good credit rates on goods she bought [...] (p. 25).

To further evidence that Tika truly objectifies, exploits and oppresses the men in her life, consider how she treats one of the men she has deliberately decided to settle down with. The man's name is Attui. Attui is actually a prototype of polygamous men in the patriarchal settings of Africa whose sole aim is to collect and fill their households with women and children. Concerning this man's voracious appetite for women and children, the narrator has this to say: "Attui, [...], had two wives, with a total of twelve children between them, and two concubines. He was always insulting his wives, dropped the two concubines when he met Tika, and made no bones about his desire to marry more women and add to his children." (Darko, 1998, p. 25). Clauses '1. He (Attui) was always insulting his wives 2. and dropped the two concubines 3. when he met Tika...' plainly denote the man's obsession by Tika. Again clauses '... 4. and (Attui) made no bones about his desire 5. to marry more women 6. and add to his children.' clearly encode the man's intention to marry Tika and have more children. Note that the expression '[he] made no bones about his desire' is an idiom and it means '[he] was very sure about his desire.'

Surprisingly enough, Tika turns down the man's marriage proposal, which is naturally uncalled for in a patriarchal context. Actually, she is not interested in marrying the man (and having children for him); what she is interested in is what the man can do to help her make more profits in business. This is to say, Tika uses her sex to subdue this man for material reasons. By so doing, she objectifies the man, giving him the impression that she loves him. In fact, when she later falls pregnant for Attui and informs him about it, the latter becomes very happy and expects her to finally accept his pending marriage proposal, which is a normal thing. But Tika categorically refuses and prefers to go for abortion instead: 'I need money for abortion,' she told him. 'You are pregnant? Good God, Tika! No! No abortion! I'll make you my third wife. Heh? Happy? [...]' 'Keep your money, Attui. I don't need it. But from now on, keep your distance. And forget you ever made love to me.' (Darko, 1998).

In *M*, the eponymous female protagonist Mema (Ntsame Minlame), like Sekyiwa in *TH*, is not formally educated but she is very unquestionably intelligent (Allagbé & Allagbé, 2015). In the novel, she is represented as someone who exercises domestic violence on her husband, Pepa (Sima Okang). The homodiegetic narrator, one of Mema's sons (Elang Sima Okang) portrays Pepa and Mema in the following text: "Mema, I hear, was so unlike my father. Pepa. My father.

Who was he really? [...] My mother had turned my father into a mere empty calabash using witchcraft.” (pp. 32-33). It is obvious in the text that while the narrator depicts male activities negatively, he represents female activities positively. In other words, while the narrator portrays Pepa as someone who takes on roles, attributes or traits which represent him as an emasculated or effeminate individual; i.e., someone who is denied his masculinity or male identity, he describes Mema as someone who performs roles that position her as masculine, powerful and aggressive. In fact, to encode this gendered experience marked by an unequal distribution of power between the two personae, the narrator mainly draws on such linguistic features as relational processes (‘was’, ‘had become’, could have been, etc.), passivization (‘had been turned into’, ‘was thought of’, etc.), activation (‘ran’, ‘must have used’, ‘to subdue’, could no longer bounce, etc.) and reporting (‘said’, ‘was told’, etc.).

Another striking linguistic feature in this text is that almost all (not to say all) of the relational processes involve Pepa as a Carrier/Token to whom such unconventional Attributes/Values as “a very calm and placid man with no real manly power in our household”, “an empty shell”, “A soundless tom-tom”, “A lion with broken legs who could no longer bounce and pounce”, “someone so subdued and bewildered by the power wielded by his wife inside and outside the hut that his voice was never heard rising above that of the panther of a woman that people called his wife” are assigned or/and ascribed. Again, all the passivized clauses in the text have Pepa as a Goal. This is to say, Pepa only performs a Goal role here; i.e. someone who does not act upon but is acted upon.

In contrast, Mema exclusively plays Actor roles in the text. Consider this aspect in the following textual snippet: “My mother, her critics said, ran every single thing in the hut with a heavy hand, and a big mouth.”, “This woman must have used witchcraft to subdue her husband.” and “My mother had turned my father into a mere empty calabash using witchcraft.” The transitive material process ‘ran’ in the first clause complex simply denotes that Mema controls, rules and dominates her hut and everything therein. In addition, the circumstance of Manner ‘with a heavy hand, and a big mouth’ therein is meant to further highlight and exaggerate Mema’s power over her hut, including her husband. Likewise, the transitive material verbs (‘must have used’ and ‘to subdue’) in the second clause complex exude that Mema has made recourse to a supernatural power called ‘witchcraft’ to control and subdue her husband’s manhood and will. The transitive material verbs (‘had turned’ and ‘using’) in the third clause complex corroborate this apprehension. It follows from this analysis to establish that the narrator-character in *Mema* has discursively represented his parents (Mema and Pepa) in subverted gender roles, attributes and traits (Allagbé & Allagbé, 2015; Allagbé & Amoussou, 2018; Allagbé & Amoussou, 2020b).

Interestingly enough, his subverted gender portrayal of male and female characters clearly exhibits the trope of female-dominance, objectification and oppression of the male body or gender. In addition to the identified linguistic resources, the narrator has deployed such rhetorical devices or tropes as simile (e.g. ‘Mema, I hear, was so unlike my father.’), metaphor (e.g. ‘[...] Pepa was a very calm and placid man with no real manly power in our household’), hyperbole (e.g. ‘My mother, her critics said, ran every single thing in the hut with a heavy hand, and a big mouth.’, ‘My mother had turned my father into a mere empty calabash using witchcraft.’) and metonymy (e.g. ‘[...] a heavy hand, and a big mouth’) to further encode the trope of male objectification or/and oppression in the text.

Shoneyin’s *TSL* (2015) thematically revolves around a secret; a female conspiracy against a man, Baba Segi (Mr. Ishola Alao). The conspiracy is actually twofold. First, when Ishola is still a young bricklayer’s apprentice with little or no future perspective in Ibadan, his mother (Mama Alaro) and her best friend (a *fufu* seller) decide, arrange and conclude his marriage with

a woman, who is later called Iya Segi (pp. 96-105). Note that the woman Ishola is to marry has a stash of money (to which she is psychologically attached). This woman's mother takes away the money from her and hands it over to Ishola's mother, who in turn hands it over to her son. Note also that Ishola does not know the source of the money. In fact, it is with this money that Ishola starts his business and subsequently becomes a successful business tycoon. For Iya Segi, Baba Segi represents nothing else but a mere object. She puts this better in the following terms: "I [Iya Segi] will follow you [Baba Segi] anywhere, my lord.' ... I would follow my money anywhere." (p. 103). Consider the recursive pattern 'I will/would follow + X ...' in the two clause complexes; where X [my money] in the second clause complex stands as a synonym or a structural substitute for or points anaphorically to X [you] in the preceding clause complex. It follows from the foregoing to claim that Iya Segi objectifies her husband by discursively associating or/and equating him with a commodity; money.

Second, when Baba Segi becomes rich, he quickly turns a polygamist who, like Attui in *TH*, values women and children very much. In the novel, Baba Segi is said to have four wives (Iya Segi, Iya Tope, Iya Femi and Bolanle) and seven children (Segi, Akin, Tope, Afolake, Motun, Femi and Kole). But none of these children is his since he cannot inseminate a woman. As the narration shows, when Baba Segi marries his first wife, Iya Segi, they expect the seed of the womb in vain for some time. And given the fact that patriarchal culture frowns at barrenness and holds only woman or the wife responsible for this, Baba Segi and his entourage, his mother included, keep on pressurizing Iya Segi. Iya Segi consequently gives in to their pressure and looks for a fertile male seed elsewhere; i.e. outside her marital home. She actually finds the desired seed in Taju, her husband's driver (Shoneyin, 2015, pp. 217-224). As the narration further unveils, it is Taju who *fathers* her two children (Segi and Akin). Taju describes their secret love affairs in the following terms: "[...] one day, my boss [Baba Segi] sent me [Taju] home to collect a parcel he had left in her care. It was a hot afternoon and my mouth was dry. [...]. I don't know what I liked more, the fan above our heads, my boss's armchair or the riding I received in it. (pp. 222-223).

As the text above clearly displays, it is Iya Segi, not Taju, who truly takes the lead in the sexual intercourse, aggressively subduing Taju and deliberately using him to sexually satisfy herself and her intended goal; i.e. get pregnant. In other words, the text encodes the trope of female empowerment through sexuality (Koussouhon et al., 2015). The underlined transitive material processes in the text 'was sitting on top of', 'riding', 'pinned ... down' and 'covered' associated with the Actor 'she' (Iya Segi) confirms the foregoing apprehension. On the contrary, Taju's use of the mood adjunct 'maybe' in the clause '[...] or maybe I covered my mouth.' encodes probability. Again, his use of the mental process 'don't know' in a projected chain with another mental process 'liked' in 'I don't know what I liked more, the fan above our heads, my boss's armchair or the riding I received in it.' denotes uncertainty and lack of volition. In the same token, Taju foregrounds the Goal 'the riding' in the clause '[...] or the riding I received in it.' These linguistic features prove once again that Taju is physically subdued and dominated by Iya Segi in the sexual act. Again, in the text, Taju draws on similes and euphemisms to express and entrench his total submission to the woman's will and power. Consider, for instance, the expressions '[...] she [Iya Segi] was sitting on top of me [Taju], riding me like a horse.' and '[...] I [Taju] found myself sitting in that armchair being ridden [by Iya Segi] like a new saddle.'

As time goes on, in an attempt to conceal her secret, Iya Segi conspires with, advises and encourages her younger rivals (Iya Tope and Iya Femi) to seek for a fertile male seed outside their marital home (see Shoneyin, 2015, p. 132, for instance). Unlike Iya Segi who physically subdues and dominates her sexual partner in their sexual rapports, Iya Tope is helplessly

pounced and rocked by her sexual partner, an anonymous meat-seller, until she reaches orgasm. Consider how she depicts this sexual experience in what follows: “He [the meat-seller] led me [Iya Tope] to his home and he took me. I will never forget that day or any other I spent with him. He made my body sing. He made me howl when he bent me over; he made me whimper when he sat me on his belly. And when he took me standing up, it was as if there was a frog inside me, puffing out its throat, blowing, blowing and blowing until whoosh- all the warm air escaped through my limbs. [...]. He asked me if I had brought him some money. I wondered if he lay with me for the money alone.” (pp. 85-86).

The most striking linguistic feature in the preceding text is the recursive use of the causative verb ‘make’ associated with the Agent ‘He’ (the meat-seller). This verb is actually employed three consecutive times (‘made my body sing’, ‘made me howl’ and ‘made me whimper’). In addition, the idiomatic or metaphorical expressions ‘bend someone over’ and ‘sit someone on something’ in the text (‘...he bent me over ...’ and ‘... he sat me on his belly.’) seem to denote causation here. In other words, the expressions ‘...he bent me over ...’ and ‘... he sat me down on his belly.’ can be logically replaced with ‘...he made me bend over...’ and ‘... he made me sit on his belly.’ in the same order. All the aforementioned features overtly encode a salacious sex scene wherein the female body is physically and sexually dominated or treated like a sexual object by a man. Again, there is a recursive use of the term ‘blowing’ (it is mentioned three times in the text). This denotes gradual or/and steady penile penetration or/and a state of gradual or/and stable sexual excitation/arousal in the passage. Furthermore, there is a use of simile marked by ‘as if’ in ‘[...] as if there was a frog inside me [...]’. The foregoing linguistic and non-linguistic features actually encode the trope of sexual liberation in the text (Chukwuemeka, 2019).

To clearly encode the trope of male sexist exploitation and objectification in the text above, the narrator-character, Iya Tope, utters the following clause complexes: ‘He asked me if I had brought him some money. I wondered if he lay with me for the money alone.’ In the first clause complex, the underlined transitive material process ‘had brought’ has ‘I’ denoting ‘Iya Tope’ as Actor, and ‘some money’ as Goal. The Goal ‘some money’ associated with Iya Tope encodes female financial freedom. In the second clause complex, the mental process ‘wondered’ projects the material clause ‘...if he lay with me for the money alone.’ Indeed, this mental process expresses the narrator’s doubt or uncertainty about the man’s intention. The projected material clause beginning with ‘if’ further reinforces the narrator’s doubt or uncertainty about the man’s intention. The material process ‘lay with’ enhanced by the circumstance of reason ‘for the money alone’ associated with the Actor ‘he’ (the meat-seller) overtly suggests the exchange of the male body for money. This implies then that Iya Tope pays the meat-seller for the good sexual services he renders her. Note that it is the meat-seller who *fathers* her three children: Tope, Afolake and Motun.

Iya Femi, like her elder rivals (Iya Segi and Iya Tope), cheats on her husband, Baba Segi, by bedding Tunde. In fact, she begins to sleep with Tunde even before she marries Baba Segi. Additionally, she is pregnant before getting married to Baba Segi. We are told this in the following text highlighting Iya Segi’s conspiracy: “One night when Baba Segi was busy pummelling Iya Tope, Iya Segi came to my room and told me how children were born in Baba Segi’s household. She said it as if the solution wasn’t out of choice but necessity. When she left my room, I smiled to myself. *I was already pregnant*. Six months later, Baba Segi and I brought Femi home from hospital. ‘He is very big for a child born three months early,’ his first wife sneered. I told her the ways of God are mysterious and snatched my newborn son from her arms.” (italics ours). (Shoneyin, 2015, p. 132). Unlike Iya Segi’s Taju and Iya Tope’s anonymous meat-seller, Iya Femi’s Tunde is financially self-actualized. This is to say, Tunde

has what he takes to marry a woman and father a home. But he has an eccentric philosophy of life: hedonism, which naturally prevents him from doing so. In connection to the foregoing, Iya Femi has this to say: “Tunde isn’t like most men; he calls himself a hedonist. He says he lives for worldly pleasures. Who wouldn’t like to live for worldly pleasures? [...] Tunde’s lips are wrapped around a cigarette and he drinks beers until he is blind. He says he wants to die both under and inside a woman who is not his wife.” (p. 136).

Iya Femi also depicts one of her secret love affairs with Tunde in these terms: “[...] He [Tunde] took me [Iya Femi] to a hotel not far from his office and said renting a room for two hours in the afternoon was called short-time. It was good to have him back between my thighs, especially after two nights with Baba Segi, whose penis was so big that two men could share it and still be well endowed. Where he used his, gbam-gbam-gbam, like a hammer, Tunde used his like a forefinger; he bent and turned until it stroked all the right places. During one of frequent short-time sessions, I told Tunde that I was married to Baba Segi. He didn’t seem surprised at all. He just smiled. ‘It can only make our time sweeter,’ he said. (Shoneyin, 2015). As the narrator-character’s depiction clearly shows, Tunde is a self-actualized person. The underlined material and verbal processes (took and said) in the first clause complex in the text confirm this. Again, the narrator-character uses two instances of the conventional structure of similes of the kind ‘X’ is like ‘Y’ to establish a comparison between her husband, Baba Segi and her lover, Tunde. Consider this aspect in the following clause complex: ‘Where he [Baba Segi] used his [penis], gbam-gbam-gbam, like a hammer, Tunde used his [penis] like a forefinger [...]’.

The aforementioned comparison unmistakably suggests that Tunde is far better and more experienced in bed than Baba Segi. Though Tunde has a smaller sexual organ than Baba Segi does, he actually uses it very skilfully to satisfy Iya Femi’s sexual desires and fantasies in bed. The identified material processes ‘used’, ‘bent’, ‘turned’ and ‘stroked’ associated with the Actor ‘Tunde’ express action, movement and volition. Surprisingly, the narrator’s comparison of the two men encodes the trope of male sexist exploitation and objectification in the text. Consider this aspect in the subsequent textual snippet: ‘During one of frequent short-time sessions, I told Tunde that I was married to Baba Segi. He didn’t seem surprised at all. He just smiled. ‘It can only make our time sweeter,’ he said.’ As the preceding textual snippet definitely unravels, while Tunde gives one the impression that he is not bothered that Iya Femi is married in that he thinks this makes, in his own words, “our time sweeter”, it is Iya Femi who really exploits and objectifies him. She also exploits Baba Segi, her husband. She actually uses both of them to satisfy her intended goal: she needs Tunde’s male seed to ensure her stay in Baba Segi’s home.

Bolanle, Baba Segi’s fourth wife, also exploits and objectifies him to some extent. But her intention and method contrast with those of her rivals (Iya Segi, Iya Tope and Iya Femi). Note that Bolanle is a university graduate. Unlike her illiterate rivals, she is naturally expected to have many future prospects and choices both in marital and professional life. But why has she chosen to marry an illiterate man, Baba Segi in the first place? In other words, why has she chosen to engage and engulf herself in a polygamous life rife with wifely squabbles and irrational jealousy? Recall that Bolanle’s rivals cheat on Baba Segi by bedding other men. They actually do so with the view to getting a fertile male seed which he cannot offer them. Recall also that these women sexually exploit and objectify the men they bed outside their marital home. In contrast, Bolanle’s intention is basically to get married to a man who does not or will not question her past. In other words, she does not marry Baba Segi because she loves him. She recounts this experience in the following text:

'I [Bolanle] wasn't seduced. That buffoon [Baba Segi] was prepared to take me as I was. He didn't ask me any questions. Neither did he know a past he could compare my present with. I was lost and didn't want to do anything with my life. He was satisfied with who I was. All he wanted was for me to be his wife. Imagine how appealing that was to me!' (Shoneyin, 2015).

As the text above plainly shows, Bolanle has a past which, when it is unveiled, can chase away from her every prospective bridegroom. In fact, as the narration indicates earlier, Bolanle is raped on a rainy day by Thomas (Shoneyin, 2015). Then she is only fifteen years old. Later, she dates a nineteen-year-old man called Segun and sleeps with him several times (p. 117). The latter actually thinks the baby is his, but whether or not he fathers the child is not overtly mentioned in the fiction. Terrified by the thought that the child might be his, Segun immediately opts for abortion. After the occurrence of these events, Bolanle develops a psychological abnormality called 'low self-esteem' in Freudian terms (Pourya, 2014, p. 2) as she repeatedly expresses a sense of guilt and self-hatred. In fact, in this state, she no longer feels her old self and as a result she ceases to show interest in the outside world. Consider how she perceives her new self after the aforementioned dignity-sapping events in what follows suit:

After everything happened, I tried hard to continue being myself but I slowly disappeared. I became Bolanle- the soiled, damaged woman. Except that was hard too because Mama [Bolanle's mother] kept trying to make me do all things the old Bolanle would have done. Don't you think you should get a job, Bolanle? Won't you apply for this bank job in the newspapers, Bolanle? Didn't you see that handsome boy that was looking at you, Bolanle? How could I tell her that I had failed to preserve my dignity? I was too ashamed to let her see the fickle shell I'd become. Inevitably, it became unbearable. The more she pushed, the more I resisted. I didn't want a job! I didn't want a white wedding! I just wanted the war between who I used to be and who I'd become to end. I didn't want to fight anymore. (p. 16)

As it clearly appears in the text above, Bolanle's new self is characterized by a strong feeling of loss, melancholia or depression and lack of volition, whose obvious clinical symptoms are "[...] a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and a lowering of the self-regarding feeling to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling" (Freud cited in Pourya, 2014, p. 2). It is with this perspective of her new self that Bolanle actually comes to Baba Segi's home; a home wherein she intends to regain her life, heal in anonymity:

Somehow, it all made perfect sense when I met Baba Segi. At last, I would be able to empty myself of my sorrow, I would be with a man who accepted me, one who didn't ask questions or find my quietness unsettling. I knew Baba Segi wouldn't be like younger men who demanded explanations for the faraway look in my eye. Baba Segi was content when I said nothing. So, yes. I chose this home. Not for the monthly allowance, not for the lace skirt suits, and not for the coral bracelets. Those things mean nothing to me. I chose this family to regain my life, to heal in anonymity. (italics ours) (Shoneyin, 2015)

When it is finally revealed medically that Baba Segi cannot impregnate a woman (Shoneyin, 2015) as a result of a disease he has contracted in his childhood days, Bolanle decides to quit him (pp. 243-245). She recounts how Baba Segi reacts when she bluntly tells him she wants to return to her parents' home in the text below:

Baba Segi was taken aback; he asked if he had offended me in any way. I [Bolanle] told him he had not and explained that there was no point staying if I wouldn't be able to give him

children. He listened attentively and promised that he would always be there to give me anything I ever needed. I saw the sadness in his eyes; it was as if it had just dawned on him that our paths had crossed for a purpose but we never meant to be together. (p. 244).

Conclusion

This paper has examined how Darko, Mengara and Shoneyin use language to represent the phenomenon of (sexually) objectified or/and oppressed male characters in their prose works: *The Housemaid* (1998), *Mema* (2003) and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2015) respectively. It has also challenged the view that holds that only the female body or gender is or can be sexually objectified or/and oppressed in a patriarchal setting. As the analysis of the three novels unveils, the three writers have drawn on such discursive or/and linguistic resources as nominalizations or grammatical metaphors, transitivity features (relational, material, verbal and behavioral processes mainly), theme predication, activization, passivization, foregrounding, structural relationship, etc. It also shows that they have used non-linguistic resources or rhetorical devices or tropes like metaphor, simile, hyperbole, euphemism, metonymy, idiom, symbolism, etc. In addition, it exudes that the writers have used the aforementioned discursive or/and linguistic and non-linguistic resources to encode a dual meaning: produce/reproduce/represent a stereotypical gendered experience in patriarchal contexts and subvert/deconstruct/disarticulate the stereotypical gendered experience as well. In *The Housemaid* and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, for instance, the male characters (Sekyiwa's husband and Baba Segi respectively) have been depicted, at a given stage of their lives, as self-actualized and powerful men who perpetuate the workings of patriarchal culture (jilting, exploiting, oppressing and objectifying women, for instance). But the same men, as the narration unfolds, turn out to be sexually exploited, objectified or/and oppressed by the women in their lives.

The same trope of male objectification or/and oppression is noted in *Mema*. But there is a slight difference with regard to the way the male body or gender is represented in the novel compared to that of the aforementioned novels. In *Mema*, the male character, Pepa, is depicted as someone who is utterly objectified or/and oppressed by his wife, Mema. In fact, the narration does not provide any discursive possibility of male independence for the man. The question that arises at this stage is: 'why do contemporary African writers use language to represent the tropes of sexually objectified or/and oppressed men in their prose works? As the analysis clearly reveals, these writers deliberately use language to represent the tropes of sexually objectified or/and oppressed men in their prose works because they intend to challenge the established social order in social life and establish a certain balance in the representation of gender or/and power relations in African literature.

Finally, it is expedient to mention that there is need to couple the aforementioned findings with an analysis of readers' responses. In connection with the foregoing, Chouliaraki & Fairclough (1999) argue that readers can establish '[...] their identities and their differences through the diverse ways in which they interpret texts, and more generally incorporate them into their own practices'. Future research can examine individual readers' reception of the prose works analyzed here to check whether or not or to what extent they shape their perception/conception of gender identity or/and ideology and power. In other words, future research can measure the levels of readers' reception and appropriation of the gendered experience represented in the selected novels.

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