

*Original Research Article*

# Orature as a Tool for Rural Women's Self-Liberation in Tess Osonye Onwueme's *Then She Said It*

Obono Essomba Anne

Abstract

Advanced School of translators and  
Interpreters, University of Buea

E-mail: [essombanne@gmail.com](mailto:essombanne@gmail.com)

The situation of environmental degradation and pollution are global concerns. In Nigeria, oil pipelines discharge petroleum waste that endangers the ecosystem. Forests, farmland and water are polluted by the oil spills. Several voices are raised to join that of Ken Soro Wiwa killed in 1995. Unfortunately, rural women are doubly affected. As the first exploiters of agricultural and water resources, they witness the sterilization of their land and the poisoning of water by chemicals that lead to famine and soil degradation. The main objective of the work is to identify the different types of oral performance used by women in the play "Then she said it" by Tess Onwueme and analyze the techniques and strategies used to overcome the dilemma. To resolve the research problem which centered on the impact of oral performance in drama, the study adopted a quantitative design that builds on sociological criticism, Africana womanism and also on thematic content analysis. The study concluded that the cultural heritage can be used as an armament in voicing out behavior likely to destroy the social quietude. As leading effort, government must acknowledge the work of the women in general and the rural women in particular in the formal decision process in their respective communities as far as soil resources are concerned.

**Keywords:** *Africana Womanism, Orature, Rural Women, Self-Liberation, Sociological Criticism*

## INTRODUCTION

The struggle for women's rights started in the late eighteenth century in Europe. Women's writings since then, have been saturated with almost one-dimensional ideology: the women question. However, the central focus of this paper is not to engage in the nuance of feminism. Rather, it is an attempt to situate Tess Onwueme's contribution to the development of modern Nigerian drama within the female quest for space within the Nigerian sociopolitical milieu. Her play most often, interrogates issues that border on governance, morality and justice. Unlike other early playwrights, she deliberately constructs the woman as an indispensable partner in the quest for solutions besetting the society. However, the central focus of this work is to identify the different types of oral performance used by rural women

in the play and analyze the techniques and strategies used to combat from oppressive power. Women in the play empower themselves technically to take control over their land. Onwueme's drama is feast with music, dance, mime drum that makes one to understand that the foundation of Nigerian literature is rooted in cultural narratives, festivals and other oral performances.

### Statement of the problem

Orature is the oral transmission of narratives and customs. It is coined from the word "oral literature". Oral has to do with something that is spoken and literature was gotten from the Latin word "literature" which means

“that which is written”. This simply means that the basic characteristic of oral literature is that it is a performed expression. This mean, an oral literary expression exists as a performance, as a speech act accentuated and rendered alive by various gestures, social conventions and the unique occasion in which it is performed. As such, the problem statement of this work is the impact of oral performance in drama and the used of oral tools as a weapon to fight against the oppressive power in the play.

## Objectives

This study centered on two objectives, which are to:

1. Identify the different tools of Orature in the work used by rural women.
2. Analyze the techniques and strategies of orature used by rural women to overcome the dilemma of oppression.

## Literature Review

This part presents a review of the literature on the various debates on our topic.

## Conceptual framework

### Orature

Finnegan (2005) notes that the definition of Orature is elusive, due to overlapping meanings and disciplines. It is concerned with the literary aesthetics of a particular culture as well as with the expressive arts bordering on communicative techniques. He considers Orature to be “a study of human communication, of that aspect of which involves the performance of songs, myths, stories, folktales and similar forms of verbal artistry”. She admits that the name whether called “oral literature, oral tradition, verbal folklore, folk literature, oral performance or Orature are contentious but whatever, Orature is concerned with “these areas of human communication and performance...now attracting increasing attention from social anthropologists”.

Asabe (2006) purports that Orature is anything that is orally transmitted whenever it is found, whether amongst primitive uncivilized, isolated people or in a civilized culture, whether it is urban or rural, dominants or subordinate group.

Zirimu (1977), on his part, refers to Orature as a spontaneous utterances said in succession, characterized by intensive creativity and imagination, usually seen in the form of songs, storytelling arts, riddles, jokes proverbs at traditional festivals. Orature can also be manifested in the usage of verbal and non-verbal language. In view of the above, one can say that the

cultural heritage can be used as an armament in voicing out behavior likely to destroy the social quietude among rural women in the play.

## Self- liberation

Self-liberation is a stage of self that can overcome the effects of social values. Once liberated, an individual can be independent from social values and thus authentic. Following self- liberation, a person can balance his/her real self with social values in order to live happily.

In other words, self-liberation is a subjective feeling of freedom. Lack of freedom can influence a person's motivation to change. For that, Self- liberation can be expressed as a positive desire to act (freedom to), or by the negative impulse escape constraints (a freedom from). More often, it the desire to be liberated from the burden of thoughts and emotions which restrict their freedom to be, or to act, as they wish.

## Rural Women

Rural women are women that lives mostly in the rural area. They have the same culture, religion and vocation (farming). Some are literate, some are semi- literate, but most of them are illiterate. Rural women are active agents of economic, social change and environmental protection. In fact, they are the backbone of agricultural labor force across developing world. Most often, rural women use their highly knowledgeable skills to create awareness to state holders, bring justice and peace in the society through their actions. Their involvement or engagement to ameliorate the wrong happenings in the society, improve on the wellbeing of the nation.

## Theoretical Framework

Literary scholars have long realized that oral performance cannot be perceived unless the socio-cultural and political contexts in which they take place are taken into consideration.

Abraham (1983) corroborates the relevance of sociological criticism as the basis of evaluating African art when he says that: “It would not be overstating the matter to note that in Black Africa, art is life and vice versa, not a mere reflection of humanity and community, but a direct engaged commentary on how things are or should be. Rather than just imitation, they heighten and intensify humanity’s most important concern”. The above quotation delineates how literature and society are connected to each other. In other words, Orature is a sum total of the by-products of different members of a society in that it is a reflection of the collective image of a particular people and an embodiment of that people’s way of perceiving

themselves and the world at large. That is the reason why Abba (2000) says “a literary work must be read with a sense of the time and place of its world. Understanding the social background and the intellectual currents of that time and that world illuminate literary works for later generation of readers.” The most highlighted developed Orature study can be achieved if two approaches are juxtaposed: putting the textual analysis on the right sociological basis. Therefore, literary tradition should be analyzed only within the scope of a given living environment which implies that Orature must be examined and understood in the cultural milieu in which it is produced; because oral narrative performance is evidently a communication system in which a social discourse take place essentially between the performer and the audience.

On the other hand, Hudson states that “Africana womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women in African descent. It focuses on displaying their suffering, demands, and unique experiences. It is grounded in African culture and therefore it is necessary focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of Africana women” (Hudson, 2001). Therefore, challenging race and class inequalities is a prerequisite for women empowerment. In Africana womanism, man is not an enemy, he is rather “the flip side of the coin” who works with the female counter part, the “original side of the coin” “to challenge their share oppression to achieve stability of the family and maintain indigenous cultural autonomy (Hudson, 2001). According to Africana womanists, women’s autonomy is pursued through commitment to family and responsibility through male/female compatibility. There is not a revolt against men, but against a racist system based on ethnic and class differences that exploits their natural resources. Therefore, Africana womanism is centered on the stability of the family as welfare of the whole African community. In conclusion, African men and women are attributed with characteristics in their struggle against racial oppression.

### Empirical review

Many scholars have worked on Onwueme’s plays. Omotosho (2019) puts into perspective her dramaturgy, at inception, as aesthetically colored with gynocentricism, thereby assuming the pioneer of gender discourse in modern Nigerian drama; in particular and in African drama at large.

Manjo (2021) analyses Onwueme’s “*What Mama Said*” and Butake’s “*Lake God*” to highlight the role of the African rural woman in the political, social, economic and cultural advancement of the society. She serves as a “conscientizer” in the struggle against patriarchy in contemporary African society. Her sense of community engagement and commitment to societal growth make her a veritable partner in nation-building. The playwrights

expose and criticize the irresponsible political governance in Africa and reveal that violence can be used for curative purpose, especially in the face of social injustice from an oppressive system.

Methuselah (2010) on his part lays emphasis on the female gendering within the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria as discussed in the play “*Then She Said It*” and the role that women play in resolving the problem.

Ekwueme (2019) examines the social constructions of gender as the encapsulation of reiterated human conducts within varying sites of performance. Contrary to the notion that gender roles are fixed by socio-cultural forces, the paper focuses on the fluidity of human dispositions in differing circumstances.

However, there is a gap between this study and the ones above. The paper aims to explore Orature tools and strategies used by rural women for their self-liberation in an oppressed society. It explores how some elements of culture that is, dance; drums and songs have been used in Onwueme’s works, why it is used and to whom it is used.

### METHODOLOGY

This section focusses on the research methods adopted to carry out the work.

#### Research Design

The study is a corpus-based study which consist in textual analysis. The study is qualitative, that is, it is based on the analysis of instances of oral performances. The nature of the study as evidence in the research question, problem, and objectives calls for a dual approach; sociological criticism and Africana womanism. In this light, “*Comprendre la parole traditionnelle*” of Jean Cauvin (1980) is used to extract the data while the analysis model proposed by Eno Belinga (1978) form the basis of the analysis. We intend to analyze the oral tools used by rural women to fight against the oppressive party.

#### Data Collection Procedure

Data is collected through purposeful reading. The text shall be read in depth and instances of oral tools which constitute the heart of the narrative will be extracted.

#### Data Analysis

This part of our article presents results from documentary research with emphasis on extra textual, micro textual and micro textual analysis.

### Osonye Tess Onwueme (1955)

Many female dramatists have emerged in the Nigerian theater to present women's experiences and have contributed eminently to the development of the genre. Osonye Tess Onwueme (1955) is one of Nigeria's most prolific and well published contemporary female playwrights. Onwueme's writings are rooted in Africa and underlined by African tradition and heritage. A leading female figure in the African theater, Onwueme's writings are women centered. Azunwo and Omovwiomo resolve: "At a time when the absence of any female voice for women within the Nigerian playwright circle was obvious, Onwueme's plays served to illuminate the courage of women" (2001). Depicting Onwueme's abilities as a playwright, Idoye illustrates: "through her discourses on gender, race, class and cultural differences, Onwueme has been able to expose the beauty and complexity of African culture to an international audience" (1995). In her drama, she explores the abilities of African women and portrays a paradigm of their unique experiences that reflect their eminent attachment to their cultural heritage.

*Tell it to Women* (1997) witnesses Onwueme's artistic maturity and ideological shift from feminism to Africana womanism. Some of her earlier plays such as *A Hen Too Soon* (1983), *The Broken Cal-abash* (1984), *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988) and *Then she said it* (2002) are displayed from a feminist standpoint. For Onwueme, Africana womanism is indubitably more applicable to her female African characters than western feminism.

### Summary of Tess Onwueme's "Then She Said It"

The play begins with a prelude that showcases the suffering of the people. The people lament and decry the issues that bedevil their region: poverty, starvation, inadequate supply of fuel, water and electricity, rape, unemployment, state-sponsored terrorism and genocide, environmental pollution and betrayal. Amidst this lamentation, the people resolve to fight back until their plight draws international recognition.

The dialogue between Obida and Niger helps to understand the drastic situation:

*Obida: They have killed everything with their pollution and spillage.*

*We cannot breathe clean air.*

*Fishes died and get fried in the polluted simmering rivers.*

*Waters, waters everywhere.*

*But no clean water to drink!*

*And now, we lose the land too*

*Niger: No fire wood because the plants and trees are soaked in oil.*

*What do they expect us to cook with?* (Onwueme, 2002)

Onwueme's "Then She Said It" exposes the complicity of "Hungarian" leaders in the pauperization of the common man: foreign oil company operators such as *Atlantic*

connives with the leaders to steal the country's oil wealth, and rewards the people with a pittance that is, in turn, stolen by greedy local chiefs such as *Ethiope*. As the exploitation of the Niger Delta people becomes unbearable, they jointly coordinate a mass protest and an attack against their exploiters oil companies, local leaders and federal government. The declaration of a State of Emergency introduces a new leader that freely uses state weapons and firepower on defenseless citizens thereby inflicting more personal pain and collective damage on the protesters than they (the protesters) caused. Having sacked many communities and apprehended a handful of the protesters, the new leader charges them to court. The new leader however is not different from the rulers he replaced. Thus, he compromises Trial Judge that will try the incarcerated protesters in court. The play is a celebration of the courage and resilience of a people as the revolt against tyranny and oppression of their leaders.

In fact, the reason d'être of the play is that, though the play itself was written about ten years ago yet, the playwright was able to foresee the deteriorating situation that has become so much a center of attention. Even though the Niger Delta problem has been around for some time, the degree of deterioration has intensified over time, given the realistic portrayal of nascent events.

On the other hand, the characters in the play bear the names of the major rivers in the Niger Delta region and beyond. Contextually *Oji* represents the South East wing of the Niger Delta region. Oji River is the name of a major river in Enugu State, South East, Nigeria. *Oshun* stands for the South West component of Niger Delta; *Kainji* is named after a dam built across River Niger in the Middle Belt region (North Central); while *Benue* signifies River Benue, a major river that runs from Cameroon and joins River Niger in Lokoja, Kogi State in Northern Nigeria. The playwright's adoption of names of the major rivers in different parts of the country is an implicit acknowledgement that the subject matter in "Then She Said It" is a national one. An international dimension to the problem is reflected in the choice of the character called *Atlantic*. He represents the multinational corporations that inflict hardship and poverty on the people of the Niger Delta. Due to his capitalist nature, *Atlantic*, in his insatiable quest for more gains, erodes joy from the region and constructs himself as a source of pain and penury in the Niger Delta. Nationally and within the play, the local leadership of the Niger Delta region is compromised. Leaders like *Atlantic* and *Ethiope*, in whom the people repose communal trust often volunteer themselves as accessories of exploitation of the area. *Ethiope*, in the play, represents compromised leadership. Apart from raping his niece, he also makes money by selling his female relatives as sex slaves to expatriate workers. The playwright indicts these royal personages, showing them to be part of the problem even when they are supposed to be protectors of the people. Oil pollution, environmental degradation, all come to play a significant

role in play. The following section examines some themes in “*Then she said it*”.

### Themes in the Novel

Onwueme makes use of a variety of themes to highlight her subject matter. They include commitment to family, determination, male compatibility, spirituality and women as Nation builders.

#### Commitment to Family

The first cluster of Africana womanism characteristics are family-centeredness, wholeness, authenticity, role flexibility, and adaptability. They all reveal commitment to family that is of major importance for African women, men and children. Family is greatly valued as an integral part of the African heritage. Africana womanism is not female-centered; it is rather “family-centered” (Hudson-Weems, 2001, p. 138). In “*Then she said it*” in movement three, Obida was arrested by the police. A crowd of women have to plead for her freedom.

*Niger: I beg. Make you lef am*

*Benue: na my friend pickin be dat*

*Women: True –true! E no be sabi anything. I beg lef am for us*

#### Male Compatibility

In Africana womanism, male compatibility means that male/female relationship must be harmonious. For the African woman, man is not an enemy; he is rather a companion and a partner in their struggle against racial oppression and class inequalities. According to Hudson-Weems, “[man’s] plight is interconnected with that of the Africana woman, who, like her male counterpart, must combat the issue of racism first” (Hudson-Weems, 2005, p. 626). They also work side by side inside and outside home for the stability of the family and the welfare of the whole community. In *The Womanist Reader*, Hudson-Weems points at male compatibility in the African milieu: “Africana men and Africana women are and should be allies, struggling as they have since the days of slavery for equal social, economic, and political rights as fellow human beings in the world” (Hudson-Weems, 2006, 43). For African women, race and class biases are prioritized over gender issues.” In *Then she said it*” in movement, three one can see the compatibility in the market place.

*“Obida pushes her way through the chaotic line, goes over, pumps and plays with the empty hose. A male voice shouts”yes sistah. Pump am, pump am, pump am well, well, I dey your side. “Another male voice replied” girl, pump it. I dey your back”.*

The above quotation shows that male/female relationship is not conflicting; it is rather complementary as they persistently work together to challenge any kind of prejudice or exploitation.

#### Determination

Weems also lays emphasis on women’s autonomy. Rather it is not a revolt against men, but against a racist system based on ethnic and class differences that exploits their natural resources. In “*Then She said it*”, before the play opens, it is the shrieking voices of women that greet the stage, as they fling in as though they managed to escape the holocaust. As their number grows to a sizeable ensemble, now joined by few males, it is still the young women amongst them that realize they have come to the limit of their struggle and it is time for the world to hear their voice. Commenting on the thematic conception of the play, Uko (2004) sees the play as a scathing critique of the oppressive, exploitative and corrupt trends in the devastated land of the imaginary “Hungeria” socio-economic system. According to her:

Hungeria is a metaphor for Nigeria, the renowned African nation with the highest concentration of blacks and one of the leading producers of petroleum in the world. *Then she said it* dramatizes the determination of the exploited, abused and marginalized Niger-Delta women to survive, give voice to their feelings and make alive all that they have known and been put through for decades but which they hitherto could not articulate or react to.

Africana womanism is an ideology that refers to all African women within the continent or those of the diaspora.

#### Spirituality

Rural Idu Africana womanists are highly spiritual as they are strongly committed to their traditions and beliefs. Idu people believe in a higher power that endows them with an everlasting spiritual life. Oshun explained to Obida whose parents were killed that “your parents are resting in the arms of theirs creator. And they hear you...us now. You think they are sleeping? No! I believe they are all here, all our people slaughtered and butchered for asking for a bite. Our dead do not sleep. Neither will our God.”

Again, in the oppressive situation, Idu women insist on performing ritual drumming and dancing just to revive their heritage. For African people, authenticity attainability is closely attached to their cultural heritage.

#### Women as Nation Builders

Rural women play a vital role in nation building which

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

### The different Tools of Orature in the Play

Orature is the art and craft of imaginative verbal expression. This work, we focus on proverbs, songs, dance and drumming.

### Proverbs

Proverbs are often a reflection of deep social and psychological experiences. Ogunjipe (2007) defines proverbs as "a short saying that uses things from the everyday life experience to teach a lesson or give advice". In *then she said it*, Onwueme's makes use of some of the following:

*-I tell you, I can't trust the baby that I'm still carrying in my womb.*  
*The one behind my back, well, how call I tell*  
*-What is a man word without land?*  
*-Life's too precious, my friend*

*-Any girl who takes a man as her handbag knows she'll go empty handed*  
*-Our dead do not sleep, neither will our God*  
*-He can do anything, but he can't hide the sun*  
*-Can you catch an old hen with mere chaff?*

### Songs

Songs occupied an important place in Africa oral literature. Songs features in all aspects of African life and is therefore known in terms of the social occasions they are associated with. These include work songs, war songs, rowing songs, hunting songs. This work is highlighted with war songs.

**Song 1:** *No! Away with the jungle!*  
*Away with the jungle*  
*We have our home, we know our place*  
*Away the silence!*  
*We have our drums (Onwueme,2002)*

**Song 2:** *We also have the song of determination*  
*Chorus: yes, the world, people of the world, let them*  
*Young woman: are you sure? Remember they can arrest you for speaking out?*  
*Jail you for life without trial, are you ready for more persecution?*  
*Young male and female: True. What else can they do to us?*  
*Chorus: What else, - what else?*  
*Young woman: Ok, then. Take your destiny into your hands. It's your choice.*  
*So now, go ahead and tell the world you're...what you are going through.*

**Song 3:** *Chorus: (Chanting): yes, about time. Our story!*  
*Hear! Hear! Hear us!*  
*Woman: Now, beat, beat the drum*  
*Chorus: (pounding their feet): Beat! Beat! Beat the drums! Drumbeats rise)*  
*Beat! Beat! Beat the drums*  
*Chorus: (Breaking into dance): Women, beat, beat, beat the drum! (Onwueme, 2002 )*

### Dance and Drumming

Dance and drumming are the purest and commonest forms of emotional, psychological and social entertainment in the African world and indeed in all cultures. Dance and some form of drumming generate rhythmic movement who often go hand in hand, in a complex mutual enhancement and aesthetic communication.

Drumming generates rhythm and rhythmic sensations touching the heart, brain and the imagination and soul of

the hearer. In "Then she said it", we have the following:

*Chorus: (Chanting): yes, about time. Our story! Hear! Hear! Hear us!*

*Woman: Now, beat, beat the drum*

*Chorus: (pounding their feet): Beat! Beat! Beat the drums! Drum beats rise)*

*Beat! Beat! Beat the drums*

*Chorus: (Breaking into dance): Women, beat, beat, beat the drum! (Onwueme,2002 )*

*Women (drumming): true daughter. She said it.*

*Show ! Show! Show them.*

*women take control*

*Take control of our lives*

### Data Analysis

Onwueme aims at using the instrumentality of drama to raise the consciousness of the female. Her attempt is to make women realize that they can only take their rightful place by struggling for it. She is so convinced that women can make use of oral tools to change their condition.

### The Use of Songs by Rural Women as a Tool for Self-Liberation

Onwueme's theatre responses to cries against the exploitation and oppression of the downtrodden. The author attempts in the play to expose mis-governance, tyranny and frivolous that the people from Hungoria are going through. This can be in this song:

*No! Away with the jungle!*

*Away with the jungle*

*We have our home, we know our place*

*Away the silence!*

*We have our drums (Onwueme,2002)*

She endows her female characters with a lot of power. Her work is a sort of shift from the weak voiceless to a powerful one. The writer does not signify women, rather she imbues them with an intrepid spirit and a resolve to meet the force of oppression headlong. This courage helps to propel the struggle, galvanizing the mass populace and rousing them from a state of inertial.

Furthermore, the female characters in the play are overwhelm with the spirit of determination. They are determined to expose their misfortune to the whole world and to bear the consequence of the military persecution on them. The following song better expresses their intention of speaking out.

*Chorus: yes, the world, people of the world, let them*

*Young woman: are you sure? Remember they can arrest you for speaking out?*

*Jail you for life without trial, are you ready for more persecution?*

*Young male and female: True. What else can they do to us?*

*Chorus: What else, - what else?*

*Young woman: Ok, then. Take your destiny into your hands. It's your choice.*

*So now, go ahead and tell the world you're...what you are going through.*

*Chorus: (Chanting): yes, about time. Our story! Hear! Hear! Hear us!*

*Woman: Now, beat, beat the drum*

*Chorus: (pounding their feet): Beat! Beat! Beat the drums! Drumbeats rise)*

*Beat! Beat! Beat the drums*

*Chorus: (Breaking into dance): Women, beat, beat, beat the drum! (Onwueme,2002 )*

One can see that despite the fact that the women are oppressed in their struggle to free themselves; they still remain very strong and determine. The philosophy of Onwueme can be best understood by the study of the larger Nigerian society where she draw her motivation. Shiva, however, notes that Third World women are not simply victims of the development process, but also possess the power for change. She points to the experiences of women in the Chipko movement of the 1970s in the Garhwal Himalayas where women struggled for the protection and regeneration of the forests.

Furthermore, the world of Onwueme's play is not limited with female characters, however, she does not only write about women. She also raise issues that talk about the socio political and economic make up of Nigeria. In fact, Onwueme is portraying what is actually happening in the play under study as the leaders are oppressing the rural communities by exploiting them physically and economically. Movement Nine presents a scene where by the women incensed by the brutality of the government organized themselves in a fury and over run the GRA/OIL club. In spite of the disproportionate use of force by the law enforcement agent on the women, they were able to kidnap *Atlantic*.

The play is also a celebration of courage and resilience of a people as they revolt against tyranny and oppression of their leaders "We want jobs, we want food, we want homes, shame must go. A gep must go. Chefron must go. Mobile must go. Texas must go. Killbros-Webros must go! Pollution must go. Leave, Leave our oil, Leave; leave our land. We want our resources. Resource, Resource, Resource Control" (Onwueme, 2002).

The young women are not left aside in the fight. Despite the fact that Oshun and Obida are being intimidated by the Government Official, they are however determined to fight for what belongs to them with the last blood in their veins. This can be seen in the following song: "Fight, fight, fight! (They chant until Obida draws their voices with vibrant drums of the Congo

music), our soul, our spirit, Fight, fight “(Onwueme, 2002).

Though the play is written about ten years ago, yet the author was able to foresee the deteriorating situation in Nigeria that has become so much a center of attention. The message of the play can be universalized as it captures the difficult situation that many African countries are going through with high level of unemployment, exploitation in its multifaceted, tribalism and a general lack of direction from the political class.

Also, the chorus, Mob leader, the Voice, all those characters cry out against the death of their land and call other people to action.

Calling the mothers and the daughters of the land, informs them of a threat to their land, their soil, stating “something .....Something strange, smelly, and strong is sapping our land. “Angry Voice “people of suffer land. Our land bleeds” (Onwueme,2002). In fact, the growing degradation of natural resources, both qualitatively and quantitatively, the increasing appropriation by the state and by private individuals, as well as the decline in communally-owned property, have been primarily responsible for the increased class-gender effect of environmental degradation. Obida with tears of lamentations cries out “They have killed everything with their pollution and spillage. We cannot breathe clean air. Fishes died and get fried in the polluted simmering rivers” No fire wood because the plants and trees are soaked in oil” (Onwueme, 2002).

With the disappearance of forests, shortage of drinking water and so on, women have to spend more time and walk longer distances to get fuel, fodder, food and water. Drying up or pollution of wells accessible to lower-caste women have meant an increased dependence on upper-caste women to dole out water to them. In a call and response sequence led by Old Voice urging questions, the chorus of women, now frenzied by their anguish and loss chat the many atrocities they and their families have experienced.

Besides one can attest that, the extra time spent in gathering has reduced the time available to women for crop production, where they are the main cultivators. Also, the little women earn through selling firewood is also reduced due to deforestation. This has a direct impact on the diets of poor households. The decline in the availability of fruits, berries as well as firewood has forced people of poor households to shift to less nutritious food and eat half-cooked meals or even reduce the number of meals eaten per day. The existing gender biases within the family lead to women and female children getting secondary treatment with regard to food and health care.

The displacement of people due to large dams, or large scale deforestation has led to the disruption of social support networks within and between villages. Women, particularly of poor, rural households, who depend to a large extent on such networks for economic

and social support, are adversely affected.

From the above examination, we can see that the rural women seem to have grown to a certain level of development in their fight for freedom. The time has come for them to rise to their responsibilities and rights.

### **The Use of Drums by Rural Women as a Tool for Political Change**

Drums device used for entertainment, but there is also potential tool used by rural women for resistance. Government officials hate the masses who mobilize to fight for their right. The government has taken away their lands. The women can't fish and farm, no potable water, the children are dying and yet nothing is done. Those women call for attention from their oppressor by using drums and songs as an avenue to convey their message. The aboriginal and feminist playwright frequently use dance as a mode of empowerment for the marginalized individuals or groups in the society. In contemporary Africa, dance, songs, and drums emerge as locus of struggle in producing and representing the individuals or cultural identity. The rural women know how to drum and dance as it is their tradition. Drumming and dancing is an opium to the marginalized, as it makes them forget their predicament, but in our case, it is a call for concern for the injustice that prevails in suffer land. As a site of competing ideologies, drum and singing also offer a site of potential fight, through representation of inner thought. During a demonstration, the police are called in who start shooting indiscriminately. We can hear Obida defiantly denouncing oppression and promising to retaliate. She shouts “we will retaliate!” and the chorus comprising of women shouts in unison, “oh yes, we will” (Onwueme, 2002).

Onwueme uses the themes of dancing and drumming in her work to show how harmonious and respectable the rural women are. Even though there is tension in their minds about the way their environment is being polluted, at the end they will conquer. In fact, we can realize that some elements of Orature are tools that the oppressed use to communicate with the oppressors just like Ngugi Wa Thiango and Ngugi Wa Mirri in their plays who portray dance, songs and drums as important tool for protest.

The heroic feat and daring spirit of Oshun, Obida, Koko and other women in the play exemplify a spirit of courage that is not only found in men. Indeed, in this particular case, men had even failed to address the rotten situation. Women take it upon themselves to challenge the injustice.

A cursory look at the Nigerian political landscape indicates that in many organizations where women have headed, a greater measure of discipline and cohesion has been attained. Consequently, successes in those organizations have been robust. *Then She Said* It is

therefore a kind of parable to the mostly patriarchal society of Nigeria to appreciate the indispensability of women in its effort to move the country forward and to achieve a greater measure of social, political and economic transformation.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the excerpts, one can identify the following constraints.

### The audience

A vital feature of oral literature is the audience. The audience is very often involved in the actualization and recreation of any given pieces of oral literature. The way in which this is so lies in the fact that the artist is usually receptive to the audience, to its reactions, expectations and cultural assumptions. The fact that the writer cannot have a face-to-face confrontation with his audience does not really bring out the characteristics of the orality.

### Improvisation

An important characteristic of oral literature which is absent from the written form is the element of constant improvisation. The storyteller, the poet and the player does not merely actualize in a dogmatic manner a pre-established form. In his performance, he exercises his creative originality by introducing new and exciting words, images, and names of objects.

Nevertheless, while oral literary compositions possess a range of qualities, which are external to written literature, most of the qualities, most of the qualities which define the literary values of written literature are also the ones which are presents in oral literary expressions. In fact, there is little or no difference in the kind of criteria, which we do not use to evaluate the *literariness* of both types of creations.

## CONCLUSION

The central focus of this work was to identify the different type of oral performance used by rural women in the play

and analyze the technique and strategies used in other to come out from the oppression power in Tess Osonye Onwueme's "*Then she said it*".

We realized that the cultural heritage can be used as an armament in voicing out behavior likely to destroy social quietude among rural women in the play. The paper also highlights that the origins of Onwueme's literature in post-colonial Nigerian is seen in cultural narratives and others oral performances. The author's works are strident criticism of Nigerian government but through the voice of rural women. Onwueme's narratives foreground ways through which one can read the rural woman in their respective societies. The plays present the rural woman as an active participant in the cultural, social, economic and political advancement of their community, thereby projecting their sense of community engagement and their commitment in building the nation. The rural women are leading efforts to push forward, but also asking for more sustainable stability in their communities.

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