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Language, Feminist Theories, and Feminine Reactions to Male-alone Rural Development Projects: The Case of Adim Married Women

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Abstract

Language plays a crucial role in people's reactions to any development. Feminine reactions to a rural development project aimed at emancipating men can be either positive or negative depending on how language is used by some women to incite or convince their other fellows. This study is aimed at examining the place of language in the feminine reactions of Adim women of Biase to a rural development project that emancipated their men. The primary data are sourced from observation, introspection, and 140 oral interviewees across seven villages in Adim. Secondary data are drawn from the internet. Survey design and qualitative method along with the suitable tools are employed. The results of the analysis show that language played a crucial role in the feminine reactions of married Adim women to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) compensations to men whose houses were demolished and plots encroached into while constructing rural street roads in Adim. Many wives saw the development as what made their husbands to womanize and disregard them. Even those who never reacted as such initially

later did as a result of how language was used by some of their fellows to discuss their husbands in relation to the project. The study concludes that feminine reactions to a male-impacted rural development project are influenced by inciting language use among the women. Mass sensitization, reorientation and men's display of positive attitude towards their wives are the panacea.

Keywords: Language, Feminist theories, Feminine reactions, Rural development projects, Adim Women

Introduction

The role of language in various spheres of life cannot be over-emphasised. It contributes to development in various ways. Also, it is the instrument for forming, communicating and spreading ideologies, including feminist ideologies. All thoughts and actions are expressed and showcased using language. This assertion is upheld by studies such as Dibie et al. (2014), Emeka-Nwobia (2015), Adie and Uwen (2019), Robert (2022), Danjuma et al. (2023). To that end, this study rises to explore the role of language in the feminine reactions of Adim women of Central Cross River, South-South Nigeria to a male-alone community development project. In exploring language and the feminine reactions, two feminist theories will be dissected in relation to the thematic concerns, to aid a better understanding of the discourse and provide the work with theoretical groundings. The two theories are Development Feminist Theory, and Womanism or Womanist Theory.

Rural development, as Ezeani (2003) has described it, refers to a series of economic and social activities, directed at a given rural population and whose converging effects indicate a progressive improvement in the quality of life, brining to or having in place an increase in the living standard of the people. Ezeani's words highlight the need for rural development, which has to be for both males and females of rural areas in order for both parties to live quality life as a result of the availability of improved standards of life and the

basic needs of life. For Abada (2012), rural development refers to calculated and deliberate efforts by individuals, groups and government agencies toward providing basic infrastructural facilities, such as water, roads, hospitals and electricity for rural dwellers, and training, harnessing and empowering the populace of rural areas for their self-actualization and comfort. Also, the United Nations Committee on Rural Development describes rural development as a strategy designed to transform rural life by making the masses of the rural population beneficiaries of economic and social progress and good standard of life. The transformation, this study argues, should be gender-inclusive.

In an attempt to ascertain why women in Adim consistently reacted to the compensations offered by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to men, whose houses were demolished and plots encroached into while constructing rural street roads in Adim of Biase in Cross River State, this study is aimed at to examining the place of language in the feminine reactions of Adim women of Biase to a rural development project that emancipated their men. It seeks to explain women's feminine reactions through the lens of the two earlier noted feminist theories. Next, the study has the objective of presenting the major findings of the interviews held with selected women in Adim. Another objective is to show evidence from extant studies that language plays a crucial role in development processes and in individuals' conception of a development project.

Development Feminist Theory and the Reactions

Here, the study attempts to explain the Adim women's reactions using the Development Feminist Theory (DFT), as a framework for understanding the reactions. That is, their reactions can be understood through lens of DFT. Accordingly, DFT advocates universal human rights, with pressure for the education of females, maternity and child health care, and economic resources for women who contribute heavily to the support of their families and the society at large, but who are yet stereotyped, neglected, impoverished and incapacitated (Boserup, 1970; Mies et al., 1988; Mohanty et al., 1991). It calls on society and its agents to strike a balance or equality between males and females politically, religiously, economically, socially, educationally, culturally and otherwise. Development feminist theorists advocate smooth, sporadic and radical

development that are capable of making changes to patriarchal traditional systems, which would significantly address issues of gender stereotype, the exclusion of women from development processes, and deprivation of rights to education and politics (Besong, 2017).

DFT also calls for a sustained spontaneous change from every societal system or practice that favours males alone. Rather, both males and females should be equally involved in development processes. DFT argues that an all-round development in society must be characterised by gender equality in all regards. By so doing, they could equally develop, be meaningful persons to society, and duly contribute equal proportions to society in all spheres. It also demands equal involvement of women in all spheres of the society. By so doing, women would be duly involved in economic development and national affairs. DFT also maintains that women ought to be made the beneficiaries of progressive development ventures, and be granted equal rights to basic education, good health, franchise, fair hearing, personal liberty, and all that the society offers to men (Besong, 2017; Robert, 2016).

The foregoing exposition makes it clear that Adim women had issues with the project because it centred on and favoured men alone. Their feminine reactions can be regarded as the display of jealousy. The women felt that they were not considered by the project initiators. Otherwise, the rural development project would have been made to be unisex, such that both male and female Adim people would have been part of it, as beneficiaries. On one hand, it is not good that the women reacted negatively, misconceived the project or even regretted the project. On the other, their feminine reactions are aspects of symbolic communication that convey their feelings about their husbands' actions sequel to the project execution. The women implied that if the project was for both males and females, their husbands would not have been acting how they did. They would not have taken to womanising and engaging in lifestyles they never did erstwhile (Anyanwu, 2024). Basically, through the lens of DFT, it is understood that the feminine reactions to any male alone rural development project are dispositions of women's dissatisfaction with a development project that excludes them. Of course, if they were included, they would not have had ill-feelings, regrets, second-thoughts about it, and so on. Based on the tenets of DFT, the women's feminine reactions arise from the gender exclusiveness of the project. It is their exclusion from the

development project that paved way for their critical considerations of and reactions to what they would have even overlooked if quite busy with the activities of the project, or also asserted by the project in question. Given the foregoing, it is quite succinct from DFT perspective why the Adim women reacted how they did.

Womanism and the Feminine Reactions

Just as done above, Womanism is explained here in relation to the feminine reactions of the women to the case study rural development project. The womanist theory (WT), also known as Womanism, is one of the strands of African feminism, which engages in gender discourse and looks at the inherent issues in the discourse from African perspective. Alice Walker, the proponent of WT, describes the womanist as "a Black feminist or feminist of colour," who expresses motherhood to children; "appreciates and prefers women's culture;" "loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually;" and is committed to the survival and wholeness of both male and female people of her society (Walker, 1983, p. xi). Her description of the womanist makes it quite obvious that the real African feminist differs from the Western feminist. Well, for this study, the typical African woman does not love her fellow woman sexually. This is one critique advanced by this study against Walker's Womanism.

Womanist feminism (Womanism) is traced to the earlier theological works of Jacquelyn Grant, Delores Williams and James Hal Cone (Orjinta, 2013, p. 62). These are: Grant's *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* and *Perspectives on Womanist Theology;* Williams' *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* and Cone's *A Black Theology of Liberation 1970*. Womanistic theology is defined by its pioneer and leading scholar, Delores Williams, as "the theology concerned with a prophetic voice for the welfare of the entire African American community, men and women, adults and children alike" (Williams, 1995, p. 67). This strand of theology challenges all forms of oppression of Black women, and clamours for significant changes that would free them from all repressive embargoes of racism, gender stereotype, abject poverty, underdevelopment and all kinds of ills hampering their well-being (Williams, 1995; Kolawole, 1997; Orjinta, 2013).

In relation to this study, one understands the feminine reactions of the Adim women to the case study rural development project as their considerations of the gendered project as being oppressive, gender stereotypical and promoting their human underdevelopment while displaying human development efforts for males of their rural area. In reality, that was not the case, as the project initiators never had that intention. Their target was to offer a deserving community development alongside compensation. Their feminine reactions are implicitly their clamour for changes that accommodate them too, which make them beneficiaries of rural development too. Of course, as rural women, abject poverty can be associated with them. Given this reality, it is quite logical to have had a rural project that accommodates both men and women of Adim. The otherwise case led to the Adim women's grievances, regrets and complaints. Just as Womanistic theology as well as WT encourages Black African women to be steadfast and uphold their faith without fear in order to sustainably pursue their voices being heard across the globe, Adim women felt the project would have been one that offered them an avenue for their voices to be heard.

According to Kolawole (1997), "the unbearable situations the Black people in particular, especially women and children, were wallowing in US and Europe led to the formation of womanist theology and womanist feminism in these continents" (p. 34). It was from there, Womanism spread to other continents, including Africa. This implies that the ills suffered by women on those continents, which led to the formation of Western feminism by Mary Wollstonecraft and Womanism by Alice Walker, never obtained (significantly) in Africa. The contact Africa had with the West led to the significant dispositions of gender ills against women in Africa. It also led to the emergence of feminism as well as the various other frameworks for pursuing gender equity. In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft championed (Western) feminism in her book entitled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In 1983, Alice Walker championed Womanism in her book entitled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. These two distinct feminists share similar views and approaches to seeking women welfare in society. What Wollstonecraft founded is the liberal feminism of the West, not the other contemporary strands of feminism like the radical feminism. Liberal feminism tallies extensively with Womanism (Anyanwu, 2023; Danjuma, 2023; Ogonnaya & Besong, 2018; Robert, 2016).

Womanism engages in theorising and narrating the gender-based tragic experiences of the African woman and the man-tailored woes she is made to suffer perpetually as a result of negative linguistic constructions, sexist gender constructions, the profiling of gender along with gendered roles, sexist history of women, myths and tales about women, and so on (Anyanwu, 2023). The womanist also narrates and appraises African women's glorious deeds in historical times, which are stereotyped on gender lane and thereby neglected or left ever untold, their proven capabilities and their displayed innovations to gendered roles (Anyanwu, 2023; Danjuma, 2023; Ogonnaya & Besong, 2018; Adimora-Ezeigbo, 1996). The womanists are African women, who realised that feminism is Western rather than African, and thereby falls short of core explanatory adequacies in narrating and attempting to address the tragic gender-based predicaments and experiences of the African woman (Anyanwu, 2023; Walker, 1983; Ogonnaya & Besong, 2018).

According to Ogonnaya and Besong (2018), womanists argue that besides excluding the African woman from feminist agenda, Western feminism does not consider the pride of womanhood in contra-distinction to manhood. This point highlights the basic difference between liberal feminism and Womanism, and the imperative of propounding Womanism as well as Motherism and other strands of African feminism. They are meant to be additional feminist frameworks that make up the pitfalls of the previously founded ones. The womanists reject the partial consideration of what affect women alone in society. Rather, they advocate a two-side consideration of all that affects women and men in society on the basis of gender. This sheds more light on why Adim women were dissatisfied with the case study rural development project in their community (Anyanwu, 2024). There was no two-side consideration of the human development. Rather, only men were considered for the development and thereby asserted with the project.

Upon being asserted, most of the men began to disregard their wives, who they probably considered to still be in the status they were too before being asserted by the project. At that point in time, the Adim men began to see themselves differently from their wives, who were still wallowing in the pitiable rural conditions they were into erstwhile. Again, womanists consider relations and interconnections as essentials of human life involving the two sexes. They insinuate that without these

essentials, life is incomplete and its science is vague. As such, for them, rather than having gendered roles hierarchy, and separatist and stereotypical gender relations and roles, gender complementarity and equity should be made to replace them across generations (Anyanwu, 2023).

By considering as well as emphasising "relations and interconnections", womanist theorists postulate that complementary gender relations and roles would do away with the gender gap (or gender imbalance) between men and women in society, while the otherwise would rather widen it or create an unresolved mighty problem that has various aspects and multifaceted phases. For womanists, despite the natural differences and gendered roles between men and men, both males and females are equal human beings by virtue of their humanness. According to Anyanwu (2023) and Robert et al. (2021), some of the manifestations of the complementary relations advocated by womanists are:

i. Two good heads are better than one.
ii. A tree cannot make a forest.
iii. What a man can do, a woman can do, even better.
iv. United, we stand; divided, we fall.
v. There is unity in diversity.
vi. Right hand washes the left, just as the left washes the right hand.

Rural Development Projects Emancipating Men: Matters

According to UNDP (1997), besides bearing motherhood, womanhood, household chores and parenting burdens, women of developing nations constitute one-fourth of industrial labour force (p. 9). Additional to home and care economies, agriculture, trade and commerce, food production, and reproduction, women are affirmed in the literature to have been significant contributors to the various endeavours of their society, including different phases of development (Robert, 2024 & 2016; Besong, 2017; Dibie, 2017; Ochelle, 2014; UNDP, 1997). Yet, they remain the poorest of the poor, illiterate, ignorant, disease-ridden, and correspondingly occupying low social economic and political status (UNDP, 1997). The case under study implies that women are often times deliberately left out of development projects. Upon being left out, matters arise, as in Adim under study.

Human development, as Ogbonaya (2021) notes, should be all-round and go beyond measuring the aggregates of variables, or increases in production statistics, per capital income or improved standard of living to the state of full availability and assurance of all the cores (ingredients) of life. Basic needs, and rights to education, private personal life, participation in social and political spheres, food, safety, amenities, housing, good health, clean environment, etc. are the noted cores. Economic development allows for the provision and availability of the basics of life for the citizens. Since studies affirm the huge contributions of African women to development, economy, education, politics, security and all other ventures (Besong, 2017; Dibie, 2017; Robert, 2016; Ochelle, 2014; Olubabunmi, 2009), it is quite worthwhile to include rural women in development projects, such as the one in Adim under study. Rather than excluding women from (rural) development projects, programmes and opportunities, they should be included in order for them to get duly developed morally, intellectually, economically, socially and otherwise. In both rural and urban areas, women constitute half of the world's population (Robert, 2024; Ochelle, 2014; UNDP, 1997). Amaechi and Muoh (2018) dissect the influence of urbanisation on the role of Ụmụada in Igboland. Just as their study sees urbanization as a threat to the survival of Ụmụada group so Adim women considered the rural development project emancipating their husbands as a source of threats to their marriage or enjoyment of non-cheating love relationship of their husbands before the emergence of the project. Agbogu and Igbokwe (2015) argues that Igbo culture, folklore and language are the sources of the gender woes the women of this culture have been suffering over the years, as these three phenomena render women subservient. The argument reflects the situation under study in that language plays a crucial role in the feminine perspectives on and reactions to the case study rural development project in Adim. This study avers that folklore is the base of the feminine thoughts held and shared among the Adim women, for which they misconceived the project and reacted negatively towards it.

More so, Udemmadu (2019) examines Igbo gender worldview, as expressed in different proverbs, and proves that women are conceived as second class citizens, who are subservient to men. The work shows that Igbo worldview is the rationale behind the proverbial expressions of inequality between men and women in Igboland. The study relates to the present one in terms of worldview in relation to

femininity. Although it is concerned with the Igbo women, it lends credence to the case of Adim women in that it makes it clear that feminine the reactions to rural development projects aimed emancipating their husbands are misconceived or regretted because of their feminine worldviews about such projects in relations to their husbands' womanizing attitude. The otherwise worldview or perception would make them understand that even without such projects, whether poor or rich, men who want to womanize would definitely do so.

The studies by Besong (2017) and Robert (2016) engage with the exclusion of Cross River women from meaningful ventures, such as development processes and opportunities. They lend credence to the present study on the case of Adim in Biase of Cross River State. Besong (2017) laments the exclusion of Boki women from meaningful ventures in Cross River State, while Robert (2016) does same on the case of the Bekwarra women of Upper (Northern) Cross River State. Robert (2016) emphasises that the consideration of women as weaker vessels makes them to be relegated. He argues that if women are weaker vessels, it implies that men are weak vessels, and if the weak vessels can do whatever normal human beings do, the weaker ones could do same. In other words, the human imperfection, for which women's own is considered as being weaker vessels, also applies to men, the weak vessels.

Therefore, both women and men equally deserve rural development projects and opportunities. The otherwise, as in the case of Adim, rouses feminine reactions. Since Adim men's houses and roads were encroached, not women's own, the compensations offered the men were ideal. Creating streets and roads in Adim remains commendable too. Nevertheless, the failure to offer women any similar opportunities paved way for their serious reactions to what their men began to do after the introduction of the rural development project that emancipated some of them.

Methodology

Survey design and qualitative method along with the suitable tools are employed. The study relied on both primary and secondary data. The primary data are sourced from observation, introspection, and 140 oral interviewees across seven villages in Adim. In each of the 7 villages, 20 interviewees were selected using the stratified

technique for the research exercise. Only females were involved in the interview. Young and old women were involved. In each of the areas, 10 young women of between 20 and 39 years of age, and 10 advanced women of 40-59 were chosen for the exercise.

The interview guide used was based on the aim of the study. Their responses were listened to, recorded and interpreted thereafter outside the field survey setting. Secondary data are drawn from several library and internet sources. Content and thematic analyses were employed in the analysis of the data. The analysis is done qualitatively or descriptively in line with the adopted method and design.

Interview Findings

Here, only the thematic concerns of the study, which informed the interview, are considered. Highlights of the interview constitute the findings from the used primary data. The demographic data of the participants are not important to the study. Thus, they are left out. The following major findings are made:

i. Sometime ago in Adim of Biase Local Government Area of Cross River State, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) compensated men, whose houses were demolished and plots encroached into while constructing rural street roads in Adim.
ii. Majority of the men's wives saw the development as what made their husbands to womanize and disregard them.
iii. Some women never saw the project as such until their fellows influenced them through tactical speech acts using language persuasively and in inciting manners.
iv. Admin women's reactions to the case study rural development project were negative, based on the feminized use of language by some women to incite and cajole their fellows about the rural development project.
v. By regretting the project and blaming the initiators for bringing what emancipated their husbands and made them to womanize, majority of the women implied that they preferred having their husbands to themselves as erstwhile to having the development and losing their husbands.

vi. Rural development projects do not only bring forth development, urbanization and new world order, but also self-assertion or liberation from timid lifestyles.
vii. Language played a crucial role in the feminine reactions of married Adim women to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) compensations to their men.
viii. Language serves as a mechanism for feminine mobilization and conviction of their fellows to react how (the way) they did.
ix. Many wives saw the development as what made their husbands to womanize and disregard them.
x. Feminine perspectives on the case study development project led to the misconceptions shared among women of Adim about the project in relation to the new lifestyles or womanizing habit of many of their husbands.
xi. Even those who never reacted as such initially later did as a result of how language was used by some of their fellows to discuss their husbands in relation to the project.

Reflecting on the interview findings, it is quite obvious that language played a crucial role in the Adim women's feminine reactions to the men alone rural development deeds in their society. Indeed, language is used to exert influence in various regards. Besides being a means of interpersonal and intergroup relations, language is a viable instrument of development (Robert, 2022; Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Also, the effects of language misuse on individuals and groups are affirmed in the literature (Nwode & Anyadiegwu, 2023; Scheffler, 2015; Benesch, 2011). By implication, the use of language in ways that engendered feminine negative reactions among Adim women of Biase in Cross River State showcases the misuse of language by some individuals and groups in society to influence some other individuals.

This study argues that language plays a crucial role in people's reactions to any development. It adds that feminine reactions to a rural development project aimed at emancipating men can be either positive or negative, depending on how language is used by some women to incite or convince their other fellows about the development project. Interestingly, studies demonstrate that language is a problem-solving mechanism (Anyanwu, 2023; Nkereuwem & Robert, 2023). As a problem-

solving mechanism, language plays a positive role by influencing individuals positively. This is possible when and where language users make use of language positively.

Conclusion

Drawing insights from Development Feminist Theory and Womanist Theory (Womanism), and interview responses, the study has so far shown that the Adim women reacted how they did because the rural development project excluded them from being the direct beneficiaries of the opportunities the project has in stock for the men. It is also realised that many of the women were influenced by their fellows, who used language technically, persuasively and manipulatively. On the whole, the study submits that feminine reactions to a male-impacted rural development project were influenced by inciting language use among the women. It considers mass sensitization, reorientation and men's display of positive attitude towards their wives as the panacea.

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