

Language, Power and Agency: The Dynamics of Verbal Violence in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

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Abstract

Review Article

Violence characterizes some interaction between people, groups and communities from the family setting to the global stage. Verbal violence is one of the most common forms of violence across societies; and has far reaching consequences on both the receiver(s) and the perpetrator(s). This paper seeks to explore the revelation of verbal cruelty in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi. The question that guides this work is: how does Ola Rotimi present wordy assault in the play *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*? The hypothesis is based on the premise that the author exposes the ills of oral violence in different segments of society. This article makes use of the Social Conflict theory by Karl Marx to analyze the manifestation of rhetorical attack in the play in line with social, material and power considerations. The research concludes that Ola Rotimi highlights the damaging effects of verbal violence anchored on the dynamics of gender, resources and power in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* at the family level and at the political arena. Therefore, Rotimi projects linguistic aggression as a symptom of malfunction at the family and political domains; but also, as an instrument of asserting power and dominance in these sectors. By offering insights into the intersection of (aggressive) language, power and agency, this article articulates how language was a key part of the sociopolitical dysfunction in post-independence Nigeria.

Keywords: Verbal Violence, Family, Politics, Social Conflict, Detriments.

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INTRODUCTION

Interaction between human beings in all parts of the world as individuals and/or groups often leads to misunderstanding and even conflict irrespective of the object of their transaction. Güçlü and Okulu buttress this point thus: "Conflict as an element of society has existed from the moment there were two or more humans to interact with each other. Most sociologists from the conflict tradition considered conflict as an unavoidable part for human association" (152). At times, such misunderstanding and conflict is expressed as violence which can be physical, emotional, psychological or verbal among others. From a general perspective, violence of all kinds has varied immediate and long-term consequences on the parties involved. Verbal violence is one of the most common forms of violence in all human societies be they real or virtual. Olagunju contends that: "Language is instrumental to conflict initiation and its resolution" (305). In physical environments like schools, offices, hospitals, markets, gymnasiums, streets and airports, verbal violence often erupts as people usually get into an exchange of harsh words when they have

difficulties moving along or getting one another. Also, on the social media, it is quite common to perceive people attack each other verbally for various motifs across platforms like facebook, whatsapp, twitter, instagram and telegram; and such exchanges could be live or recorded. In some circumstances, the people involved in harsh oral exchanges, stakeholders in the object of interest as well as by-standers and passers-by often try to mitigate the circumstances or end the verbal violence. Given that literature is an artistic representation of societal realities through the lens of the writer as affirmed by Olagunju when he says "Plays are written to mirror human society" (305), many writers always project conflict especially verbal violence in their texts. One of such authors is Ola Rotimi and this work aims at analyzing the manner in which he projects verbal violence in the play *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. The research question that steers this work is: how does Ola Rotimi present wordy assault in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*? The hypothesis is anchored on the premise that the author exposes the ills of oral violence in different compartments of society. Rotimi's world in

Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again is made up of characters that are very conscious of the great divisions along status, gender and material and overall class lines; and interaction between people in different groups often leads to violence especially of the verbal type as some characters seek to maintain the rigid class distinction in their community while others struggle to dissolve it. Thus this article makes use of the Social Conflict theory by Karl Marx to analyze the manifestation of rhetorical attack in the play in line with social, material and power considerations. This choice of theoretical perspective is based on Güçlü and Okulu's declaration that: "Marx is the founding father of Conflict Theory" (151) and Li's stance thus: "It (Marx's theory) indicates ideas of the root problems of social disruption and class conflicts" (29). Li further indicates that: "He (Marx) indicates the conflicts between the ruling classes and working classes" (29). I therefore use the Social Conflict theory according to Karl Max with particular focus on the verbal dimension along class lines dictated by gender, material and status in analyzing wordy attack in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi..

There exist some scholarly works on *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi. For example, Olagunju (2020) analysis selected passages of the play using the Speech Act theory particularly Searle's speech function. He reveals that directives are predominantly used and representatives were close in terms of frequency of usage; while expressive and commissives were hardly employed. He concludes that such knowledge will facilitate interpretation and understanding of the play by the readers. On his part, Adeot (2020) uses Cultural Feminism as the theoretical framework and textual analysis as a method of data collection in his examination of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. The work does a comparative and contrastive analysis on the virtues of Mama Rashida and Liza; and concludes that their different inner positive personalities explain why Liza chooses to live with Lejoka Brown when he is voted out of office while Mama Rashida and Sikira decide to leave him. Assogba (2019) scrutinizes the play with the help of the Systemic Functional Linguistic requirements of text study. His analysis delves on selected moods, modality and adjunct types to reveal that male characters are more dominant and powerful in the play while women, on the other hand, are calm and docile in line with their roles in the typical African traditional setup. Unlike the other works, this article examines the manner in which Ola Rotimi represents verbal violence based on gender, class and material considerations in *I Will Marry When I Want*. This study is divided into two sections. The first part analysis verbal violence at the family level and the second part examines it at the political level.

Verbal Violence at the Family Setup

The family is the nucleus of every society and it could be argued that every community is a reflection of

the collective average experiences in the various households therein. Consequently, a close examination of the family can be a prediction of the occurrences in each society. When violence generally and verbal violence particularly is predominant in families in a locality, such an area could contain a lot of violence since there are likely going to be spillovers from the families to the streets, offices, theatres among others. As far as *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* is concerned, Lejoka-Brown's family which reflects society embodies a lot of verbal violence. This corroborates the perspective of Omer and Jabeen on Marx thus: "Karl Marx sees society as an arena of social conflict" (196). This is announced very early in the play when in the stage directions of Act One Scene One, it is stated that: "Sikira [...] is sitting, legs wide open in a settee, listlessly eating an orange, and making mouths" (3). The verbal violence in Lejoka-Brown's household is perceived along gender lines as seen in Lejoka-Brown's wordy abuse with his wives; along status lines when we consider his verbal attacks on Polycarp and finally on material lines considering his linguistic demeaning of Okonkwo. This is in line with Aydin's statement on Marx thus: "According to Marx, struggle and conflict are not natural consequences of human nature and social life. Exploitation and the class system force people into conflict, preventing cooperation and collaboration inherent in human nature" (247). Güçlü and Okulu add that: "Conflict can be the catalyst for revolution or the basis for a meeting of the minds" (152). The manifestation of verbal conflict at the family level and its effects is the focus of this section.

Lejoka-Brown, one of the main architects of verbal violence in the play, is presented very early in the play practicing oral assault. When Lejoka-Brown is singing and exercising, his friend Okonkwo informs him that his wife is laughing at him as he attempts military steps with his fat stomach. Without stopping his exercise, Lejoka-Brown replies Okonkwo thus: "Hep... a woman...hep...an ordinary...hep...woman! [...] As for you hep...six years in England-hep...has made you... hep...soft likehep..woman!" (5) This is an instance of verbal violence lodged on gender issues as Lejoka-Brown insinuates that Okonkwo is not supposed to consider what "an ordinary woman" is saying. He uses simile to indicate that Okonkwo is now "soft like...hep,,woman" after spending six years in England; instead of being strong as men ought to be. However, Lejoka-Brown to Okonkwo that his fatness is becoming a call for concern by stating that: "You are right, mate, fatness has begun to "monkey" with my body!" (6) The metaphoric use of "monkey" to describe his fast-growing body is both funny and mean.

Lejoka-Brown turns his attention to his wife, Sikira, and introduces Okonkwo to her saying: "Wife! Do you you see this man, don't you? I know you think he is one of those tiny little Sanitary Inspectors who

come here every Wednesday morning to peep in your water-pots in search of mosquito eggs! (5) Lejoka-Brown refers to sanitary inspectors in such derogatory terms as “tiny little” because he thinks that there are of a far lower class than him. He continues telling his wife that: “This man here is that same brave soldier, Gideon Abednego Okonkwo, who fought shoulder to shoulder with me in the Congo against those long-nosed Belgians.” (5) The expression “long-nosed” Lejoka-Brown uses to describe the Belgian soldiers is harsh and carries a racist undertone. This lexical rampage is repeated later on in the play when Lejoka-Brown is introducing Okonkwo to Liza. Lejoka-Brown calls Okonkwo “Come over here, you rascal.” (34) And proceeds to tell Liza that: “Now, wife, you think this man looks like a retired choirmaster ohhh.” (35) Lejoka-Brown refers to Okonkwo as a “rascal” before comparing him to a retired choirmaster due to his poor looks reminiscent of his low social status before indicating that fought very hard together in the Congo going without food or water for several days

Lejoka-Brown calls Sikira and when she does not come immediately, he rhetorically asks: “Where is the Sikira who answered “shaann” just nown na? (6) The onomatopoeia in the use of “shaann” to describe the way Sikira answered constitutes an instance of verbal violence. It should be noted that the women to whom Lejoka-Brown uses harsh words because he thinks they are “ordinary” women talk to him with a lot of respect and reverence. This is why Sikira answers “Coming my lord” (6) to her husband Lejoka-Brown. Mama Rashida also refers to Lejoka-Brown as “my lord” in the question: “Did my Lord call?” (12) The expression “Lord” often used when referring to God Almighty is equally employed by Mama Rashida when asking her husband what he will like to eat thus: “What will my lord eat this evening?” (9) This could be traced to the Islamic culture and African traditional patriarchy that reigns in the community.

An aspect of verbal violence based on status and material possession is perceived when Lejoka-Brown is telling Okonkwo that he is doing well in the cocoa business after resigning from the army about three years before as he states: “If they put you on auction right now – you, your degrees, your coat, everything...I can buy you ten times, and still have plenty money left to buy you all over again” (6). It is quite mean for Lejoka-Brown to say that he can buy Okonkwo and his certificates many times over and his money will not get finished. Yet Okonkwo thinks it is normal to say so since he is richer than Okonkwo. When Lejoka-Brown describes how he will illicitly enrich himself through politics, it confirms the views of Omer and Jabeen who posit in line with “Karl Marx conflict theory which confirms that power group has access to resources and life chances which unprivileged have not” (195). Lejoka-Brown also feels justified to describe his party members in insulting terms

because he is richer and of higher status than they are. In this light, Lejoka-Brown tells Okonkwo who expresses doubt on the success of the “surprise and attack” war approach in politics that: “Politics is war. [...] Last time I took things slow and easy {...} lost a by-election to...a small crab...a baby monkey” (7). Lejoka-Brown refers to the party member to whom he had lost an election as “a small crab” and “a baby monkey” because he thinks that they are lower than him in status. This is also why he curses his servant Polycarp for interrupting his demonstration of the “surprise and attack” tactics in politics by saying: “The god of iron stuff this bottle down your noisy throat!” (7). This is because he considers Polycarp as a “nobody”.

Lejoka-Brown tells Okonkwo about how his father married Mama Rashida, his late brother’s wife to him out of pity without his knowledge “Not that I don’t like Mama Rashida as a person. I like and respect her – in many ways she is just like Liza herself – you know – well-mannered, quiet, full of concern: a well-bred African pigeon” (9).

Also, Lejoka-Brown’s sarcastic responds to Sikira who inquires about the contents of the cablegram Polycarp had brought is a subtle combination of verbal violence and sarcasm. He rhetorically asks: “Is your name Rahman Lejoka-Brown?” (10) Similarly, Lejoka-Brown’s silence when Sikira asks him “Will she (Liza) be bringing us chewing-gum” (13) can be considered verbal violence. This is because the husband completely ignores her and continues talking to Okonkwo and say goodbye to mama Rashida as if she does not exist. He continues by telling Okonkwo that: “I married that Problem (Sikira) four months ago” (10). Lejoka-Brown explains that his reason for marrying Sikira whom he refers to as a “problem” for women’s votes in the upcoming elections since her mother is the all-powerful leader of the Nigerian Union of Market Women.

Lejoka-Brown is not the only person who manifests verbal violence at the family level in the play. Sikira is very much prone to it as seen when she tells Mama Rashida ‘I don’t care what she (Liza) thinks’ (15). This happens when Mama Rashida tells her that she should join in keeping the house clean so that Liza will realize that human beings, and not animals, live on it. When Mama Rashida adds that she needs to have shame, Sikira says: “Shame! My spit” (15). This is an indication of the jealousy Sikira has for Liza even before she arrives. This is clearly brought out when she rhetorically asks Mama Rashida “Will our husband care for me when that Miss world is coming here?” (15) In this exchange Sikira derogatorily refers to Liza as “That black-white woman who spent her whole life roaming the streets of America” (150). This is just a foundation for the harsh verbal exchanges that will take place between Sikira and Liza when Liza finally arrives. The same attitude is seen in Sikira’s reaction to Musatafa when he asks the time

“the young lady” (Liza) is arriving. Sikira says: “Young lady – ha! That witch is old enough to be my grandmother!” (18) This does not please Mama Rashida who rebukes her thus: “Shame on you! Such rudeness-right in the presence of an elder (180) Mama Rashida is a foil to Sikira and tries to prevent her from using harsh words when talking about Liza and teaches by example. When Polycarp tells Mama Rashida that Liza is around, she instructs him “You run quick and help bring in sister Liza’s things” (19). It can be seen that Mama Rashida is already creating an affinity to Liza by calling her “sister” even before meeting her. Child bearing is the reason for the contrasting reaction of Sikira and Mama Rashida to Liza’s arrival as Sikira thinks that their husband will no longer attend to her making it difficult for her to have children unlike Mama Rashida who already has them.

When Liza finally arrives, the verbal violence that Sikira had started manifesting becomes more intense. Liza, thinking that she is Lejoka-Brown’s only wife, mistakes Sikira for a housemaid and tells her that she is not supposed to peep to the master’s room when he is sleeping before noticing that he talks politics in his sleep. Reacting to that, Sikira rhetorically asks Mama Rashida “Did you hear that grasshopper? I told you she would come and kick everybody round and round.” (24) Here, Sikira refers to Liza as a “grasshopper” to demean and annoy her. She continues to use bird imagery on Liza when she says: “Let go, mama Rashida. That fowl wants her proud feathers plucked” (24); while preparing to fight Liza who asks what she had just said. She affirms that: “I’d rather die than let that cockroach kick *me* around” (24). When Mama Rashida tells her to calm that after Liza asks who a cockroach is and Sikira responded by inquiring who the housemaid is, she goes ahead to ask Mama Rashida rhetorically “Didn’t you hear what that antelope called me [...] First thing that mosquito did was land on my head, biting me all over” (24). As seen in this exchange, Sikira calls Liza a grasshopper, fowl, cockroach, antelope and mosquito in a fit of anger fueled by jealousy just to demean and annoy her. Liza does really get offended and talking to Mama Rashida about Sikira while pointing to her direction says: “[...] that smutty, ill-bred, foul-mouthed, uncouth, mangy, grossly ribald, whipper-snapper of a chipmunk!” (25) This is an example of hostile exchanges of words not based directly on differences in class and/or gender but on misunderstanding between co-wives. However, the conflict indirectly hinge on class as Liza views Sikira as a servant in the Lejoka-Brown household.

Mustafa is another character who uses very harsh terms when referring to other people. This is brought out when he tells Mama Rashida and Sikira about the government demolition of his house. He states: “The government demons broke it down with their whiteman’s machine. [...] I could not stop the devils.” (17) [...] “Tell the master not to try fighting the devils.” (17) Mustafa refers to the government officials who

demolished his house as “demons” and “devils”. He is empathic in such usages as he tells the women that: “Tell the master that the Government devils gave me three thousand pounds for my house. So he should not take a half-penny less for a place like this one” (17-18).

Lejoka-Brown equally exhibits trash talk when complaining to Okonkwo about how things have changed and he is sweating up and down renting an apartment for a woman to hide two others when his grandfather had one hundred and fifteen wives in their patriarchal society. He laments that: “ But here I am , with only two crickets, expecting one more – just one more canary, and I can’t just pick her up by the arm and say to her: ‘Woman, I forgot to tell you: but as the whiteman says ‘better late than never’. Here – meet your other ehm...sisters-in-marriage.’” (28) It is cruel for Lejoka-Brown to refer to his wives as “crickets” and “canary”. Okonkwo advises Lejoka-Brown against the use of harsh words with or when referring to Liza by employing the proverb: “A paddler doesn’t say a crocodile has an ugly lump on its snout, until he has safely crossed the river” (290). Okonkwo basically means that Lejoka-Brown should not use derogatory statements towards Liza as long as he has not settled the dispute they have; and prescribes the egg treatment of Liza to Lejoka-brown.

In a related development, Lejoka-Brown transfers his literal aggression to Polycarp who has just announced to them that Liza is already at home while they are still expecting her in the airport. Lejoka-Brown tells Okonkwo about Polycarp “Are you listening to the crazy idiot?” (310) This abuse is a way of erasing his disbelief over the fact that his plans to avoid uncontrolled contact between Liza and the other wives has failed. Lejoka-Brown directly addresses Polycarp who wants to execute when jokingly sent by Okonkwo to buy toilet tissue for his master who upon hearing that Liza is indeed in his house is confused and takes the posture of someone on a pit toilet by asking: “Madman, where are you going?” (30) When Polycarp says he wants to buy toilet paper for him, he angrily says “Na so your papa dey take shit? Hunh? Answer. When your papa wan go latrine, he go take shokoto put for nyash; he carry damask agbada cover body, take come knock for head finish, then come butu dey shit for International Airport” (310). Lejoka-Brown does not only refer to Polycarp as a madman but also indexes his father in the pidgin English castigation filled with rhetorical questions. Polycarp is asked if Liza exchanged words with Mama Rashida and Sikira and when he says he does not know, Lejoka-Brown literally assaults him thus: “Don’t Major me, you goat. What are you good for anyway? *This*, you don’t know; *that*, you don’t – what are you? A banana?” (31) After being referred to as a goat and asked if he is a banana. Polycarp suddenly remembers that the ladies did talk to each other and says “Oh, dem spoke, Oga Major” (31) And Lejoka-Brown asks “What, Oga Idiot? Spoke what?”

Angrily?..Laughingly?” (31) Despite being referred to as an idiot, Polycarp is unable to say what he heard the women talking about; and Lejoka-Brown rhetorically asks Okonkwo in pidgin English: “You see the kpokpo-garri way God gimme for houseboy?” (32) At this stage he tries to kick Polycarp. Polycarp dodges the kick and takes off running while the master chases him. When Lejoka-Brown calms down, he calls Polycarp “Goat” and the latter answers “Sir”. Lejoka-Brown instructs “Run on...tell them we’re coming”; to which Polycarp answers “Yes Major” (33). In this exchange, Lejoka-Brown refers to Polycarp as garri and goat but he does not bother because the class difference between them as conditioned by the master-servant relationship has normalized such vituperation.

Due to her disappointment and anger towards Lejoka-Brown for not telling her that he had two other wives, Liza emits a considerable quantity of phrasal cruelty. For example, Mama Rashida tells Liza that she is the only woman Lejoka-Brown loves and just married herself and Sikira for other reasons; and Liza bursts out thus: “For Heaven’s sake – stop defending that devil” (32). Mama Rashida characteristically tries to calm her down saying that their husband is not a devil. Liza finally meets Lejoka-Brown tells him she married him in the Congo thinking that she was the only wife; not knowing that she is one of three “sacrificial slaves” (39) in his “nauseating, clay-walled, gas-chamber” (39) of a house. This castigating description of Lejoka-Brown’s house is Liza’s way of telling him that he is poor and not up to her standard. Lejoka-Brown ignores the reference to women as “slaves” and loudly expresses his dissatisfaction to the insulting words used to describe his house and the reference to him as a possession. Liza offends Lejoka-Brown more by saying that: “Only bushmen and hooligans shout” (38). Consequently, Lejoka-Brown’s anger intensifies and Liza tells him that anger can make him a nuisance in addition to increasing his pulse rate and overworking adrenal glands while running the risk of having affected kidneys, nerves problems, psychosomatic breakdown, peptic ulcer, high blood pressure, asthma, obesity, dermatitis, headache, insomnia, migraine, cardiovascular disorder among others, Lejoka-Brown angrily says “oohh...don’t wish death on me, witch” (40). Referring to Liza as a witch is one of Lejoka-Brown’s highest points in name-calling.

The high rate of scurrility in Lejoka-Brown’s household ends up entering the speech of the otherwise very polite Mama Rashida. An instance can be seen when she is telling Liza about how tough business has become. In a flashback, she says: “Time was, Sister, when chicken was “nice trade”. But now! Every lizard of a pretty-trader has climbed up to sell chickens. So what happens? Chickens price climbs up. Nobody buys” (33). Here, Mama Rashida abusively refers to traders who joined the lucrative chicken trade later as “lizards”. This implies that she looks at them with disdain; implying that even

among the lower class there is inequality. The derogatory use of animal imagery to refer to competitors is also highlighted when Lejoka-Brown is trying to calm Liza down so that they reconcile. He tells Liza “You don’t want my enemies to call me a bush pig, do you? ‘Bush pig Lejoka-Brown. He wants to be a national leader, yet his own house is jagajaga upside down” (41). In this case, Lejoka-Brown is reading into the minds of his opponents and predicting the phrasal cruelty he will receive if he does not reconcile with Liza and put his marriage in order before elections.

Lejoka-Brown’s household is a breathing ground for oral brutality with the protagonist himself being a master. He verbally assaults his wives on the basis of gender, lexically attacks Polycarp on the basis of his lower class since Polycarp is his master and literally abuses Okonkwo on material grounds since Okonkwo is poorer than him. Most of the recipients of such castigation accept the status quo without talking back or even getting angry, while Liza particularly talks back to Lejoka-Brown; though they all exchange a good deal of lexical rampage among themselves for various reasons linked to class, status and material possession.

Verbal Violence in the Political Arena

When the family contains the huge proportion of oral brutality as seen above, it is predictable that such castigation spills over to the larger societal sphere given the direct link family occurrences have with societal realities. It is therefore not a surprise that the political arena in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* should contain instances of trash talk projected along gender, status, material and overall class lines; in accordance with Güçlü and Okulu’s view of Marx thus: “For Marx, human history is defined by class struggle” (153). This section examines the manifestation of verbal violence in the political domain on the backdrop of gender, status and material exigencies.

From the political perspective, the first instance of verbal attack in the play is presented during the planning meeting at the conference room of the National Liberation Party headed by the chairman Lejoka-Brown when Mallam Gaskiya interrupts Lejoka-Brown to condemn his ‘surprise and attack’ strategy. When a member tells Mallam Gaskiya that he is out of order, he says: “Protocol be hanged! Listen, fellow. Let’s stop fooling ourselves! Please. This military Surprise and Attack nonsense won’t work in a political campaign” (52). After wordily buttressing his disregard for protocol, Mallam Gaskiya narrows down his castigation on Lejoka-Brown thus: “And aside from the fact that the present leader of our party is so old-fashioned and autocratic about the risky implementation of his whimsical strategy, the whole mumbo-jumbo about military exercise in a political set-up is a sham” (52). From this declaration, Mallam Gaskiya’s choice of words like “old-fashioned”, “whimsical” and “sham” is

more likely going to annoy and offend than to make peace and compromise. As a result, Lejoka-Brown reacts by saying that: "How do you know surprise and attack won't work in politics? What do you people know about politics – I mean hard-bone politics? Small, small boys, all of you... went to Europe and America, studied book, came back, talk big talk. You think politics in book is politics in real life? You lie, Book-heads! Politics means action, and action means war. Therefore, Military surprise and attack can win us votes if only we" (52). Here, Lejoka-Brown responds not only to Mallam Gaskiya but a group of educated people in his party whom he considers as lacking in practical political strategic. This is the class of people he castigates as "Book-heads"

Predictably, this offends members of the educated class he has just verbally abused and they begin to leave the meeting. Instead of choosing words that will appease the exiting members, Lejoka-Brown intensifies his oral assault as he shouts: "This is sabotage! Come back...Mallam Gaskiya...I said come back! Things must be done constitution-like. All right, every jackass go home...go..." (52). Referring to the much-needed party members as "jackass" is an aspect of trash talk that is suicidal in terms of Lejoka-Brown's political aspirations. Lejoka-Brown tells Okonkwo that he will go ahead and implement the surprise and attack approach in his political campaign; adding that "And Allah help any crab among them who dares stop me. [...] I'll show them that I'm different" (53). In this case, Lejoka-Brown continues using insulting and condescending language while referring to the party members who disagree with his "surprise and attack" campaign strategy by referring to them as "crabs". This imagery is aimed at belittling them and showing that they are below his level.

Back in Lejoka-Brown's house, serious political developments are unfolding. Sikira and Liza have kept aside their initial differences and Sikira is getting sensitization and motivation from Liza. Sikira tells Liza "You are a strong woman, with a strong, strong heart. Sometimes I wish I had your kind of strong, strong heart, so I could tell our husband to go to hell." (53) The act of verbally castigating her husband to "go to hell" represents emancipation to Sikira. However, Liza, her mentor, rebukes her thus: "That's silly – it isn't right for a woman to tell her husband to go to hell, without a reason. [...] You must have a good reason for doing so; otherwise, it's ...sheer rudeness" (54). But Sikira persists by indicating that: "But he too acts rudeness-like to me sometimes" (54). This is the beginning of Sikira's awareness that men and women are created equal and that what a man can do a woman can also do; and their stride towards the dismantling of the female exclusion from major issues like politics spearheaded by the likes of Lejoka-Brown. This aligns with the views of Marx and Engels who opine that: "Every class which is struggling for mastery, even when its domination, as is the case with

the proletariat, postulates the abolition of the old form of society in its entirety and of domination itself, must first conquer for itself political power in order to represent its interest in turn as the general interest, which in the first moment it is forced to do" (1845: 54). Women therefore need to be politically more active and gain power in order to improve their situations.

In a related development, Lejoka-Brown comes back home and sees Sikira singing songs of freedom to women and she suggests that all women can create a women's party, win elections and become leaders. Lejoka-Brown addresses to Sikira thus: "Your legs; those of a baby antelope...zig-zag in movement. What's the matter? (55) Liza tries to defend Sikira and tells Lejoka-Brown that it is wrong for him to insult Sikira by comparing her legs to those of a baby antelope simply because she is doing something normal for all human beings to do. As a responds, Lejoka-Brown tells Liza: "Talking grammar!" (56) This is a sarcastic way of saying that she is speaking nonsense. Lejoka-Brown's harsh words to both women have gender underpinnings.

At this juncture, Lejoka-Brown realizes that Sikira is putting on what he considers inappropriate clothing and bursts out: "What is that partly-hatched lizard egg for. [...] Go take the rag off" (56). When Sikira tries to say that what she is wearing is the dress worn in America and England, Lejoka-Brown curses: "The devil take you and your America" (57). After Sikira tries to resist, he adds "Do just as I say quick, or I'll tear off that half-peeled banana from the rest of your body" (57). Lejoka-Brown threatens: "For the last time, sister, let your feet take you to your room fast before thunder rumbles down the group" (57). Sikira rhetorically asks if she is a slave in Lejoka-Brown's house before being ordered around, and Lejoka-Brown says "You are one of the crazy headache I've been crazy enough to get into my crazy head!" (57). The "headache" allusion here is about all his wives and women in general. Thus Lejoka-Brown categorizes women as a problem irrespective of their individualities. Liza tries to defend Sikira and Lejoka-Brown tells her: "My dear woman, you have sunk to the low, low, low bottom of moral rud!" (58) This harsh metaphor used by Lejoka-Brown is another degree of his use of verbal artistry in an aggressive way.

Lejoka-Brown realizes that he has committed a political blunder by verbally attacking his party members and he organizes a reconciliation and face-saving news conference at his residence. Lejoka-Brown gets wind of the fact that Liza left the house for a stroll in beach wear and keeps Polycarp on the watch so that she will not appear in such outfit before the press and party members. Shortly afterwards, Polycarp whispers to him that Liza is coming back from the beach dressed in bathing suit – bikini prompting Lejoka-Brown to shout at the party executive members and journalists present thus: "Back, all of you! Bloody busy-bodies! Get back" (63). Here,

Lejoka-Brown does not only embarrass his guests by shouting at them to move backwards, but also insults them by calling them “bloody busy-bodies”. As if that is not enough, realizing that Liza is already so near that they cannot go to the next room without seeing her, Lejoka-Brown orders them to lie on the floor with their faces facing the ground and adds that: “I dare anyone of you to look up before I tell you to. By God and Allah, if I don’t blast off your groins as I did to those long-nosed Belgians in the Congo, call me Bastard!” (64) Lejoka-Brown’s abusive attitude is highlighted in the threats he gives the journalists and party members and also in the almost racist way he describes Belgian soldiers as “long-nosed”. When Liza steps into the house, Lejoka-Brown orders her to go straight to her room very fast and insulting her thus: “Go! You cheap, street woman!” (64) Someone in the curious prostrate group whistles after seeing Liza’s outfit and Lejoka-Brown bursts “Who whistles that crazy, night-club whistle? (65). No one responds and he continues saying: “You fear to talk, hunh? I see...but you’re not afraid to whistle like a crazy sailor inside this sacred house of my fathers!” (65) This action compounded by the lexical cruelty infuriates the party executive members and the press members and alienates both the educated members of the party and women whom he considers inferior to his military-financial and masculine status respectively.

The executive members of the party are so offended that they call a National Liberation Party emergency meeting. During this meeting, Osagie angrily states: “We can no longer compromise the ideals of the National Liberation Party, with the abjectly myopic, not to say, old-fashioned, authoritarian leadership of Mr. Rahman Lejoka-Brown” (66). Osagie’s reference to Lejoka-Brown as “myopic” and “old-fashioned” constitutes phrasal brutality towards the latter. Madam Ajanaku does a similar thing when talking about how she, an Owerri woman, gave her daughter’s hand in marriage to Lejoka-Brown who is Yoruba as a way of promoting national unity; before adding that: “I no know say na mango-mango, manafiki man nahim Lejoka-Brown bem o!” (66) Here, she says she never knew that Lejoka-Brown was a hanky-panky, hypocritical and selfishly cunning individual. She states that: “This wuna Lejoka-Brown, abi na Lejoka Yellow he say him be sef” (67) kicked her daughter from his house like a dog. By referring to Lejoka-Brown as a hanky-panky, hypocritical and selfishly cunning person, and sarcastically referring to him as “Lejoka Yellow”, Madam Ajanaku is mounting a literal assault on Lejoka-Brown.

Finally, women move that Lejoka-Brown be voted out of the party totally and replaced by a female leader, and not just given a vote of no confidence as the party executive suggests. Mallam Gaskiya asks the party deliberations to go on break for ten minutes so that the executive members have consultations regarding the new

developments, and Madam Ajanaku says: “Dat na too much grammar. We want woman candidate – wuna gree abi wuna no gree. We nodi beg wuna. Political party dem baco for this country; dem di wait we for vote” (68) She makes verbal mockery of this proposal which she sarcastically refers to as nonsense, before reaffirming their stand with the threat a taking woman to join another party. Mallam Gaskiya replies that they will be back in about fifteen minutes and Madam Ajanaku says: “Na wuna sabi! When una talk munumununu finish make una fin’ me come for my house. Abi?” (68) And she rhetorically asks the audience “Man wey carry ogbono soup-pot for hand, and di man wey carry foo-foo for head, na who go fin’ who go?” (68) In this circumstance, Madam Ajanaku uses pidgin English belittle the party executive and their suggestions that did not align with the aspirations and empowerment of women. This is in line with Marx’s theory as Li states that: “Marxism encourages people to protect their rights and encourages workers to achieve their goals [...] Marxism creates a system with shared equality in which an emphasis on human rights is important” (29). This is the coming together of women to fight for their rights by combatting male domination and liberate themselves.

Back in Lejoka-Brown’s house, Liza and Lejoka-Brown are having strong emotional and verbal exchanges. Liza tells Lejoka-Brown that: “I should have got out of here long ago and sued for immediate divorce. But like the idiotic daydreamer that I am, I kept hoping that after the elections, you’d come back to being the man I once knew in the Congo, and we’d sort things out honorably. But what is my reward? You called me ‘a cheap, street woman’ right in the presence of...” (69); while expressing her anger over the fact that Lejoka-Brown called her “a cheap, street girl”, she uses harsh words upon herself by saying that she was “an idiotic daydreamer” in thinking that her husband would change after elections. Lejoka-Brown tries to explain himself and tells Liza that he intended to become an important personality after winning elections and make life comfortable for her. When Liza says his material possessions mean nothing to her and he insists that all women always say the same thing, Liza bursts out: “Is that so! Very well then, if you think you can make me happy only after you’ve become the prime minister of the whole continent of Africa and by riding in a hundred Rools Royces strung together, with money strewn on the ground for me to walk on, then you are no more the Rahman Lrjoka-Brown I once loved – no” (70). This hyperbolic projection of Lejoka-Brown’s political and financial successes in a sarcastic manner constitutes subtle lingual rampage from Liza. She becomes even blunter with her insults when she tells Lejoka-Brown that: “You’ve now become a depraved, no-good scoundrel with the tastes of a pig, obsessed with the putrescent values of a maggot! Now [...] get out of my life!” (70) This use of animal images in name-calling

Lejoka-Brown is the apex of Liza's trash talking and represents women's strides towards equality with men.

At this juncture, Lejoka-Brown loses hope in politics and is willing to direct his energy towards farming, saving what he can from his marriages and protecting his house from demolition. When Liza tells him that the two of them cannot fight the government when they come to demolish his house, Lejoka-Brown says: "Nonsense!" (75); before explaining how he and Okonkwo fought seventy-seven Belgians in the Congo for five and a half days with no food or water. While this is unfolding, Okonkwo consistently shouts Lejoka-Brown's name to announce to him that Sikira has become the party leader. Before Okonkwo could give the information, Lejoka-Brown asks: "So what's the crowing all about?" (76) Here, Lejoka-Brown metaphorically refers to Okonkwo as a bird. A similar verbal assault takes place when he rhetorically asks "Who is that crab" (76) after he sees Sikira borne shoulder high by a crowd as the new party leader and she throws slogans about freedom being practiced everywhere. By metaphorically referring to Sikira as a crab, Lejoka-Brown wants to belittle her since she is a woman thereby undermining her ability to lead the party. The reality though is that the educated party members whom Lejoka-Brown considered inferior as well as the women he regarded as second class citizens have all revolted and overthrown him the self-proclaimed superior in gender, status and material. This confirms Güçlü and Okulu's declaration regarding Max thus: "Marx believed that at his time or sometime in the near future, the proletariat could free itself from the bourgeoisie. The proletariat will overthrow the bourgeoisie and gain political control sooner or later" (154). This is part of the evolution of society as Li confirms in Marx's stance that: "Marxist theory revealed the principle of the evolution and development of human society" (32). Here, the previously neglected groups have taken over power.

In the political sphere, Ola Rotimi highlights several instances of verbal violence. It is true that politics is a game of opposition, contradiction and confrontation. But such exchanges are expected to normally take place in a spirit of mutual respect and fairness. In the play, however, political events at all levels are marked by verbal attacks, trash talk and name calling between people divided along gender, status and material lines. At the end, the women and the educated party members whom Lejoka-Brown considers as lower in status and direct enormous verbal towards, seize political power from the likes of Lejoka-Brown who considers himself superior in status, but not without emitting verbal violence of their own.

CONCLUSION

Verbal violence is projected in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* at the family setup

and at the political arena. The oral assault between characters are hinged on class considerations because some personalities like Lejoka-Brown perceive themselves as superior to others like his wives in terms of gender, Polycarp regarding status and Okonkwo in material possessions; and find it justifiable to literally abuse them in the family context. It is not surprising that Lejoka Brown who is a mastermind behind scurrility in his household should be one of its major actors in politics given that he is a key political leader. He therefore trash talks women on grounds of gender and other party members due to their class which he considers inferior. In the household and political spheres, some characters passively accept the vituperation due to the societal norms dictated by tradition, patriarchy and Islam; while others, like Madam Ajanaku, talk back, mobilize and collectively gain political power thereby overthrowing the former leaders. Ola Rotimi highlights the damaging effects of verbal violence anchored on the dynamics of gender, resources and power in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* at the family level and at the political arena. Therefore, Rotimi presents verbal violence as a symbol of malfunction at the family and political levels; but also, as a way of imposing control in these areas. The paper delves into the convergence of language, power and agency; and illustrates how language was a vital element in the political and social deterioration of Ola Rotimi's Nigerian society after independence.

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