

# A feminist critical discourse analysis of selected sex-related Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbials

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## Abstract

This article examines a corpus of sex-related Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial versions with a view to performing a comparative analysis of the ideological gender-based constructions in the two sets of proverbs. Post-proverbials are alternate variations of conventional proverbs, mostly used humorously by the younger generation. Focusing on 10 purposively selected sex-related Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbial equivalents, the study conducts a qualitative analysis of the proverbs from the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis. Findings from the analysis reveal the traditional sex-based Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbials to be largely sexist. However, some major gender-based ideological shifts can be observed in the post-proverbials, which include: an ideological shift from antiquated notions to more modern and innovative perceptions; a radical ideological shift from the euphemistic and symbolic stance of traditional sex-based proverbs to blunt and direct stances; and a gender-based ideological shift to a discursive stance of solidarity with women. The study, thus, concludes that the assimilation of gender-based modern concepts like female genital circumcision, the reality of HIV/AIDS, and the utilitarian role of condoms into sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials portrays the subtle shift of the Yoruba culture towards more feminist values.

**Keywords:** sex-based Yoruba proverbs, post-proverbials, feminist critical discourse analysis, gender and ideology



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### **About the author**

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## Introduction

Proverbs are ornamental communicative modes that facilitate the intergenerational transmission of the traditions, values, norms, philosophy, institutions, beliefs, experiences, and artefacts of any speech community (Ademowo and Balogun 2015; Finnegan 2012). Africans greatly esteem the deployment of proverbs in conversational exchanges. According to Finnegan (2012, 379), proverbs "seem to occur almost everywhere in Africa, in apparent contrast with other areas of the world," making them highly critical in grasping African cultures and wisdoms (Chiangong 2015).

For Africans, proverbs are commonly used in conversational exchanges to convey connotative meanings (Fakoya 2007), and skilled orators are notably distinguished by their deployment of "apt and appealing proverbs" in conversations (Finnegan 2012, 402). There is, in consequence, if not a need, then a general desire, to express abstract ideas using metaphoric forms, imageries, allusive phrases, compressed and forceful wordings, promoting the use of proverbs among Africans (Finnegan 2012).

Terseness of form, popular acceptability, relative structural fixity, and poetic quality distinguish African proverbs from other linguistic and literary maxims (Finnegan 2012). However, any notions of the relative fixity of proverbial structures and their popular acceptability are now considered controversial (Finnegan 2012; Raji-Oyelade 1999). In contemporary times, the supposedly sacrosanct and unmalleable structural forms of traditional proverbs are radically and progressively threatened and rescinded by "a new rhetorical tradition" among the younger generations of users (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 74). The structural fixity of traditional proverbs is being radically ruptured, birthing new proverbs with new structures, meanings, and values that to vari-

ous degrees have supplanted their traditional predecessors (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75). In the literature, these newcomers have been termed "post-proverbials" (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75). The following provides an example of a traditional proverb (P1) with its post-proverbial version (PP1):

P1: *Aye l'ojā, orun nile.* ('The world is a marketplace; heaven is home.'

Meaning: It is better to do good always because we shall all die someday.

PP1: *Aye l'ojā, amo, e fimiī le s'ojā.*  
(‘The world is a marketplace; so, leave me in the market.’)

Meaning: Who cares if existence is temporal! Just let me have fun and do as I like!

(Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 13)

This article examines this kind of proverbial breach in the Yoruba socio-cultural context. The study is motivated by the need to juxtapose the ideological gender structures in sex-based Yoruba post-proverbials against their original equivalents in order to identify any ideological shifts in the post-proverbials. Sex-related proverbs in the Yoruba setting are proverbs using sex and/or sexual organs as their objects either denotatively or connotatively (Ademowo and Balogun 2015). Although many scholars have explored sex-based traditional Yoruba proverbs, only Ademowo and Balogun (2015) have examined sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials. This dearth of studies on sex-related post-proverbials, therefore, necessitates exploration of shifts in gender ideology in sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials. Specifically, this study seeks to (i) identify semantic differences in selected sex-related traditional Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial others; (ii) construe and compare the ideological gender structures in the two sets of proverbs; and (iii) elicit the ideological gender shifts in the post-proverbials. This way, the article con-

tributes to a better understanding of the proverbial dynamics of changing gender norms among contemporary Yoruba speakers.

## Post-proverbials in the Yoruba culture

Post-proverbials, also known as “supplementary proverbs” (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75), are alternate proverbs (with altered structures, new meanings and values) used humorously in place of the original proverbs. The emergence of post-proverbials speaks of and manifests “a radical overturning” of the fixed forms of conventional proverbs (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 74). This overturning has led to the creation of values and functions different from those associated with conventional proverbs (Chiangong 2015; Raji-Oyelade 1999). The transformation is driven by a younger generation of users, and it unfolds as a gradual rescission of the fixity of the conventional formal properties and meanings of the traditional proverb, to make room for post-proverbials with their new playful forms (Raji-Oyelade 1999).

Among the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria, proverbs are regarded as conveyors of the spiritual essence of the cultures, traditions, values, beliefs, and collective knowledge systems of the people (Makamani 2012; Ojo et al. 2018). The Yoruba people treat proverbs as facial cosmetics, assigning them the utilitarian role of beautifying their communicative acts. Among them, proverbs are mostly used by elders, with the younger people often required to seek the permission of their elders if they wish to speak in proverbs in a conversational exchange (Chiangong 2015; Ojo et al. 2018). However, the emergence of post-proverbials among young people in the Yoruba culture can be seen as a form of verbal-cum-cultural revolt against the puritanical stances of the elders (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75). The post-proverbial creations reflect the inextricable enmeshment

of the new generations with two prominent yet conflicting cultures – those of “orality” and “literacy-modernity” – taking the form of a “critical correspondence between an older, puritanistic generation and a younger, disruptive, and somewhat banalistic generation” (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75). The efforts of the younger generation to find new ways of expressing its identity and experiences have led to a seemingly innocuous, playful blending of the traditional proverbial statements with modernist values (Okpewho 1988; Raji-Oyelade 1999).

This blending has culminated in a deliberate “playful blasphemy” of traditional Yoruba proverbs (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 75). As Raji-Oyelade (1999) suggests, post-proverbials in the Yoruba cultural context can be regarded as blasphemous supplementary proverbs that (due to their potential variability) lack the structural rigidity and reverential status accorded the typical traditional proverbs of the older generations. By implication, only the older generations of Yoruba proverb users see post-proverbials as blasphemous; the younger generation considers them inventive, humorous creations. In their post-proverbials, the younger generations parody age-old proverbs. The creations are not blasphemous per se, but rather present meanings mostly opposite to those conveyed by their original equivalents. Such ideological gaps these playful blasphemies or rhetorical parodies have generated among the Yoruba are the focus of this article.

In spite of the notable cultural import and subversiveness of these wilful rhetorical reformulations, the novel post-proverbial phenomenon has nevertheless remained under-researched. All the same, there are a few studies to have explored Yoruba post-proverbials as modernist rhetorical superimpositions. Raji-Oyelade (1999), who introduced the notion of post-proverbials, has discussed the way proverbial blasphemies are brought into textual play. Using 10 pairs of Yoruba proverbs together with their post-proverbial others, he

examined the linguistic and semantic re-ordering of typical traditional proverbs, highlighting the process by which post-proverbials assume the character of playful blasphemies in the Yoruba proverbial discourse.

One basic factor identified by Raji-Oyelade (1999) as a precondition for the making of successful post-proverbials in informal discourse is the process of differential iterability. A process of supplanting marked by “the ability to repeat with a difference” (Raji-Oyelade 1999, 76), it can result, for example, in the following form:

Traditional Yoruba Proverb: *Màlùù tí kò ní'rù, Olüwa níi ba l'esin.* ('As for the cow that has no tail, God is its repellent against flies.'

Its Postproverbial Other: *Màlùù tí kò ní'rù, ó wà n'Sábó.* ('The cow that has no tail is available at Sabo market.'

(Raji-Oyelade 1999, 76)

In the traditional proverb and its post-proverbial other here, two clauses separated by a symbolic comma can be observed in each. The traditional proverb (the primary arrangement) forms the root of its post-proverbial other (the secondary arrangement); the first clause is termed by Raji-Oyelade (1999, 78) as the signal clause, while the other clause represents the completing clause. The structure and the maxim of the traditional proverb remain culturally given and sacrosanct, while the repetition of the traditional proverb in the post-proverbial other comes with a difference enabled by the replacement of the completing clause with a new element.

Thus, in the secondary arrangement (the post-proverbial), the completing clause of its original equivalent is supplanted by a signifying supplement. The symbolic comma marks the verbal boundary where the transformation is effected and the rhetorical point that allows for the differential iterability (Raji-Oyelade

1999, 78). Through the process of differential iterability, the traditional proverb then witnesses a clausal alteration. Basically, the primary distinguishing characteristic of a typical post-proverbial is thus the displacement of the completing clause (Raji-Oyelade 1999).

Ademowo and Balogun (2015) have focused specifically on sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials. Critically examining fifteen Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial constructions, their study looked at the semantic effects of the rhetorical reformulations of such proverbials. As their findings reveal, typical traditional sex-related Yoruba proverbs are not concerned with sexuality per se: where they refer to sex organs, it is primarily as a means of visual symbolism to communicate “stark and frank situations” (Ademowo and Balogun 2015). The post-proverbial equivalents of these traditional proverbs, however, are principally concerned with sexuality, in that they foreground sexual imagery in their constructions. As the authors observe, “the mentioning of sex organs in sex-related proverbs has no implications on original meaning of proverbs but this is not the case with postproverbials as the sex image and sexual performance becomes the main focus” (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 9). They thus conclude that sex-based Yoruba post-proverbials are semantically different from their original equivalents, and that they therefore have distorted constructions.

The present study intends to build on Ademowo and Balogun’s (2015) work by performing a feminist critical discourse analysis of sex-based Yoruba post-proverbials. At the same time, this study differs from Ademowo and Balogun’s in that, while they focus solely on the semantic effects of the post-proverbials, in this article I juxtapose the post-proverbials with their original equivalents in order to detect any ideological gender shifts in the rhetorical transformations involved. This is with a view to foregrounding the proverbial

dynamics of changing gender norms among contemporary Yoruba speakers.

## The theoretical paradigm

This study seeks to analyze sex-related proverbs with their post-proverbial others using Lazar's (2005) feminist critical discourse analysis (hereafter FCDA). FCDA explores the relationship between power and ideology in discourse and the way this relationship helps sustain a certain gendered social order (Lazar 2005). Gender ideologies and asymmetrical power relations in diverse discursive structures and contexts are imbued with complexities and subtleties in different degrees and forms. Accordingly, FCDA is a theoretical approach that critiques discursive structures, features, and strategies in texts and talk in order to understand diverse discursive ways through which hegemonic relations are enacted and perpetuated but also challenged (Lazar 2005, 1–2).

FCDA emerged due to the necessity to establish within critical discourse analysis (CDA) a critical feminist perspective, one that Wetherell (1995, 141, cited in Lazar 2005, 3) characterizes as a distinct "feminist politics of articulation." Accordingly, FCDA can be seen as a newly advanced approach in CDA that explores the workings of asymmetrical gender relations, power, and ideologies in diverse socio-cultural contexts. In examining the multi-dimensionality of FCDA as a theory and a practice, Lazar (2005) comes up with five connected feminist CDA principles: feminist analytical resistance; gender as an ideological structure; the complexity of gender and power relations; discourse in the (de)construction of gender; and critical reflexivity.

FCDA is a form of feminist analytical resistance that critiques discourse with the aim of exposing and resisting gender inequalities in diverse socio-cultural contexts and practic-

es (Christie 2000; Lazar 2005). The primary concern of feminist critical discourse analysts lies in criticizing discourses that sustain a gendered social order where men are privileged and women disempowered (Lazar 2005). Thus, FCDA constitutes a feminist approach that critiques gendered social practices and relations with the ultimate goal of contesting the status quo in order to realize equal gender and power relations (Lazar 2005, 6).

Ideologies, from a feminist critical perspective, are group representations of social practices formed "in the interest of maintaining unequal power relations and dominance" (Lazar 2005, 6). Although this view of ideology can be traced back to Marxist accounts of class relations, the concept today encompasses other oppressive relations, such as gender relations (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Lazar 2005). Feminists have criticized the prevailing ideological gender structure for merely mapping people into two categories, male and female, on the basis of sex difference, resulting in hierachal relationships of subservience and domination (Lazar 2005). More recently, feminist scholars have disputed the presumed unity between sex and gender in which gender is seen as the exclusive interpretation of sex. Feminists' contention now hinges on the distinction between gender and sex. As Butler (1999, 9–10), for instance, argues, "the distinction between sex and gender serves the argument that whatever biological intractability sex appears to have, gender is culturally constructed: hence gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex". Thus, deviations from the archetypal maleness and femaleness pertinent in most societies/cultures usually occur against the prevailing ideological gender structure and are mostly frowned at (Lazar 2005).

In the Yoruba culture, Oyewumi (1997) argues that the ideological gender dichotomy observable in Euro-American culture is not reflected in the Yoruba language and social prac-

tices; and that seniority, not gender, orders societal structure and hierarchical relationships in the Yoruba context. Bakare-Yusuf's (2003) extensive critique of Oyewumi, however, has hollowed out her claims. Using some pejorative Yoruba proverbs in which inanimate objects, bodily excreta, and some other negative metaphors are variously used to represent women, Bakare-Yusuf (2003) convincingly shows how women indeed are derogated in the Yoruba language. This derogation not only differentiates females from males, but it also "has implications for the kind of life experience an individual has, depending on the social value and significance attached to their anatomical body-type" (Bakare-Yusuf 2003, 128). Bakare-Yusuf's critical review thus reveals the presence of ideological gender difference in the Yoruba socio-cultural context.

To feminist critical discourse analysts, gender ideologies in most societies are discursively (re-)enacted as normal and consensual, and thus hegemonic. This hegemony obscures gender inequalities, resulting in many cultures in 'tacit-androcentrism' (Lazar 2005, 8). Nevertheless, in spite of their hegemonic nature, gender ideologies at the same time also remain contestable, in that existing gender structures can be ruptured and transgressed. For this reason, FCDA not only focuses on the institutionalization of gender ideologies, but also examines the ways in which such ideologies are contested (Lazar 2005).

As, for example, Lazar's (2005) work shows, third-wave feminist and post-structuralist theories have increased our understanding of the complex workings of gender and power relations in diverse social settings. This complexity can be viewed from two broad angles: starting out from a recognition of the difference and diversity among women and men, which has necessitated contingent analyses of gender and sexism historically and culturally; and/or by emphasizing the ubiquitous, subtle discursive operation of modern power in

myriads of contemporary social orders (Lazar 2005, 9). Despite the diversity in forms that gender and sexism assume in different cultures and across time, the pervasiveness of the ideological gender structure in terms of power asymmetry has continued over time. The primary goal of feminist CDA, therefore, is to "undertake contingent analyses of the oppression of women" in its various complex diversities (Lazar 2005, 9).

FCDA also views discourse as a significant element of social practices that are "discursively represented in particular ideological ways" (Lazar 2005, 11). Discourse constitutes social practices that (re-)enact and maintain unequal social order, as well as resist and transform that order. FCDA, therefore, focuses on "how gendered relations of power and gender-based ideologies are (re) produced, sustained and contested in texts and talk" (Lazar 2005, 11). Discourse contributes to the (de)construction of unequal gender relations in the aspect of "gender relationality" (Lazar 2005, 11). Gender relationality entails two kinds of gender relationships. The first focuses on "the discursive co-constructions of ways of doing and being a woman and a man in particular communities of practice," while the second examines "the dynamics between forms of masculinity" and how these further subjugate women (Lazar 2005, 12).

Critical reflexivity as a praxis is a crucial facet of the practice of FCDA. Reflexivity, a term that can be traced back to Giddens (1991), refers, among other things, to people's tendency to use their acquired knowledge about social processes and practices to shape their own subsequent social practices (Lazar 2005, 14). Significantly, the ultimate goal of feminist critical discourse analysts is to ensure a social transformation that engenders equal power and gender relations. Hence, a discursive criticism of the "prevailing limiting structures" becomes necessary (Lazar 2005, 16).

In light of the above, FCDA suggests it-

self as a useful theoretical framework for the qualitative analysis of the gender-related ideological differentials between the selected Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial others. Accordingly, the analysis in this article aims at identifying any ideological gender shifts in the post-proverbials, analyzing the changing gender-based ideological trends in sex-related Yoruba proverbs, and examining the proverbial dynamics of changing gender norms among contemporary Yoruba speakers.

## Research methodology

The data for the study consists of 10 sex-related Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbial versions. The proverbs were selected from collections in Ademowo and Balogun's (2015) work on sex-related post-proverbials, which I will argue against in this article. Ademowo and Balogun randomly selected 15 traditional proverbs and their post-proverbial versions from the proverbial expressions being used anonymously among the Yorubas, and also from collections of proverbs in Ojoade (1983), Owomoyela (1972), and Yusuf (1997). Ten out of the 15 sex-related proverbial expressions used in Ademowo and Balogun (2015) were selected for this study. The selection criterion was the translatability of the proverbs.

To enable determination of any semantic differentials between the traditional proverbs and their post-proverbials, the selected proverbs were, first, re-translated from Yoruba into English. Some of the resulting translations of the literal and symbolic content of the proverbs and their post-proverbials in this study came to differ from the ones given in Ademowo and Balogun (2015). This is both in the interest of translation accuracy and grammatical fidelity. After this, the obtained textual data were subjected to a feminist critical discourse analysis in order to identify and compare their ideological gender structures.

In what follows, the analysis is presented in three sections. First, the data used in the study is described. Second, the two sets of proverbs are examined in order to discover any ideological and structural gender differences between them. Lastly, any such shifts detected in the post-proverbials compared to their originals are discussed, investigating the ideological dynamics of changing gender norms in the Yoruba proverbial rhetorics.

## The proverbs and their literal and symbolic meanings

In this section, the data are presented to portray the semantic differences between the selected sex-related traditional Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial others. This is in order to determine any changes in the literal and symbolic meanings of the proverbs as we move from them to the post-proverbials. In presenting the two sets of proverbs, each traditional proverb is indicated as "P[n]" and its equivalent post-proverbial other with a "PP[n]." The literal and symbolic meanings of the proverbial contents are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The proverbs and their literal and symbolic meanings

Proverbial Content Categories	Literal Meaning	Symbolic Meaning
<b>P2:</b> <i>Ope l'obinrin, gbogbo eni ba ni igba lowo ni i gun</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Women are palm trees; anybody with a climbing rope climbs them.	Women are promiscuous; any man with a good penis can sleep with them.
<b>PP2:</b> <i>Ope l'obinrin gbogbo enito ba ni condom lo n ba won sun</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Women are palm trees; anybody with a condom sleeps with them.	Women are promiscuous; anybody with a condom sleeps with them.
<b>P3:</b> <i>Meta ni t'obinrin: gba fi bo enu, gba fibo ara, gba fi bo abe</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Give women three things: one for the mouth, one for the body, and one for the buttock.	The proverb implicitly foregrounds women's loquacious/ glutinous and promiscuous attitudes and the need to curtail them.
<b>PP3:</b> <i>Meta ni t'obinrin, gba fibo enu, gba fi bo idi, gba fibo obo</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Give women three things: one for the mouth, one for the buttock, and one for the vagina.	Explicit foregrounding of women's loquacious/ glutinous and promiscuous attitudes and the need to curtail them.
<b>P4:</b> <i>Adoni l'aya o jebi, aya yin ni e kilo fun</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Anyone who sleeps with one's wife should not be blamed; the wife should be warned instead.	Foregrounds mildly women's infidelity and the need to put them in check.
<b>PP4:</b> <i>Adoni l'aya o jebi, iwo ni ko lo lo paraga</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 16).	Anyone who sleeps with one's wife should not be blamed; one should rather take strong drinks to boost one's sexual power.	The proverb attributes a wife's infidelity to her husband's erectile dysfunction; and the solution lies in taking erectile-enhancing drinks.

<b>P5:</b> <i>Oko n re ile obo, obo n leri, ipade d'ori eni</i> (Owomoyela 1972, 755, cited in Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>The penis wants to pay the vagina a visit, and the vagina is boasting, they should both convene on the bed to know the superior.</p>	<p>A woman's boasting against her male counterpart is insignificant. Generally, boasting is insignificant when the two parties involved can prove their prowess.</p>
<b>PP5:</b> <i>Oko n re ile obo, obo n leri, won fe do'ra won pa ni</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>The penis wants to pay the vagina a visit, and the vagina is boasting, do they want to fuck themselves to death?</p>	<p>Boasting is insignificant.</p>
<b>P6:</b> <i>Aki i ti oko o bo obo tan ki a tun ma beru wibe iho re jin, ibi ti o ba wu obo ki o ma gbe oko lo</i> (Ojoade 1983, 205, cited in Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>One cannot insert the penis into the vagina and start questioning the deepness of the vagina; the vagina should carry the penis wherever it pleases the vagina.</p>	<p>Once you commence a project, do not question its feasibility.</p>
<b>PP6:</b> <i>Aki i ti oko bo obo tan ki a tun maa beru HIV, kinni ise condom</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>One cannot insert the penis into the vagina and begin to fear contracting HIV, what is the use of a condom?</p>	<p>The post-proverbial propagates the use of condoms.</p>
<b>P7:</b> <i>Obo ni itiju oun lo po to be ti oun fi lo sa pamo si ibi ti oun wa; sugbon ti oun ba ri oko, oun lati si ilekun fun un</i> (Ojoade 1983, 209, cited in Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>The vagina says that her high level of timidity has prompted her to hide in her present position, but once she sees the penis, she must open the door for it.</p>	<p>The proverb talks about women's promiscuity. It also relates implicitly the futility of keeping secrets.</p>
<b>PP7:</b> <i>Obo ni itiju oun lo po to be ti oun fi lo sa pamo si ibi ti oun wa; sugbon oun feran oko gan</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 17).	<p>The vagina says that her high level of timidity has prompted her to hide in her present position, but she loves the penis dearly.</p>	<p>The post-proverbial expressly portrays women's love for sex.</p>

<b>P8:</b> <i>Nkan n be leyin 'ma do mi niso'</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).	It is ominous when a woman keeps saying she wants sex.	One should be wary of women demanding sex often.
<b>PP8:</b> <i>Nkan n be leyin 'ma do mi niso', maltina kan ati miliki meji laaje</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).	It is ominous when a woman keeps saying she wants sex; the partner should simply drink one bottle of maltina and milk as energy booster and go on to satisfy her (Ademowo and Balogun 2015).	By taking one bottle of bottle of maltina and milk every time, one can satisfy a woman who demands for sex often.
<b>P9:</b> <i>Ti a ko ba tete ge idan ni kekere, bi o ba dagba tan, ebo nla ni yio ma gba lowo oko</i> (Ojoade 1983, 212, cited in Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18; Yusuf 1997, 126).	If we fail to cut the clitoris when it is still tender, it will demand expensive sacrifices from the penis when it becomes mature.	The proverbial extols female genital circumcision. It also implies that one must take measures to nip a problem in the bud before it escalates (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).
<b>PP9:</b> <i>Ti a ko ba tete ge idan ni kekere, bi o ba dagba tan, that na FGM joor</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).	If we fail to cut the clitoris when it is still tender, that is Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), please.	The post-proverbial preaches against female genital mutilation.
<b>P10:</b> <i>Eekan l'atannido n tannido mo</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).	Whoever deceives to fuck can only do it once.	One can only deceive once before being discovered.
<b>PP10:</b> <i>Eekan l'atannido n tannido mo, eyi ti ko smart niyen</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).	Whoever deceives to fuck can only do it once; that is, if he is not smart.	“Master your cajoling skills” (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).

<p><b>P11:</b> <i>Eni dobo leekan to gan lese, oko re a le</i> (Yusuf 1997, cited in Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).</p>	<p>Whoever fucks once and punches the vagina has forgotten that his penis will soon become erect (Ademowo and Balogun 2015).</p>	<p>Women's indispensability to men. Opportunity once lost cannot be regained.</p>
<p><b>PP11:</b> <i>Eni dobo lekan to gan lese, o ti lowo asewo lowo ni</i> (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).</p>	<p>Whoever fucks once and punches the vagina has money to patronize prostitutes.</p>	<p>Women's indispensability to men. “Be ready to pay for your actions” (Ademowo and Balogun 2015, 18).</p>

## Ideological gender structures in the proverbs and their post-proverbials

Three basic ideological gender structures can be elicited from the proverbs above: discursive construction of binary gender-role distinctions; discrimination against women; and resistance to discrimination against women. Below, each of these features is examined in turn.

### Discursive construction of binary gender-role distinctions

The above sex-related traditional Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbial others have largely contributed to the discursive construction of binary gender roles that spell out ways of doing and being a woman/man in the social practices of Yoruba communities. The two sets of proverbs portray, however, different roles for men and women in the Yoruba culture. Through the prevalent use of the names of sex organs, *oko* (penis) and *obo* (vagina), gender role distinctions and expectations typical of the Yoruba context are mapped out. In all the selected proverbs and post-proverbials, the recurrent references to the sex organs make dominant a notion of sexual intercourse

in which women are portrayed as sexual objects for the pleasure of men. This asymmetrical sexual relation between men and women, depicted in the proverbs and post-proverbials, ideologically represents a gendered structure founded on sexual difference. This seems to lend support to Bakare-Yusuf's (2003) claim about the visibility of gender differences in the Yoruba language. Thus, the traditional Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbials foreground a gendered structure ideologically grounded in the Yoruba social-cum-sexual practices.

This finding, however, stands in contrast to Ademowo and Balogun's (2015) claim that typical traditional sex-related Yoruba proverbs do not in fact depict sexuality, but primarily use sex organs for the purposes of visual symbolism only. Although implied meanings could be generated from the traditional proverbs, sexuality is notably inherent in the proverbs as well as in the post-proverbial versions presented in Table 1. The present study, accordingly, argues that sexuality is foregrounded in sex-based Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbials. The foregrounded sexuality in the two sets of proverbs discursively constructs gender role distinctions that map out maleness and femaleness in the sexual practices of Yoruba communities.

However, while the traditional proverbs are subtle, symbolic, and witty in their sex-role portrayal, their post-proverbial others are uncompromisingly forthright. Consider, for instance, P2 and PP2: *Igba* (a climbing rope) in the two proverbs symbolically represents *oko* (penis), but the completing clause *ni i gun* (to climb) in P2 connotatively depicts an act of sexual intercourse. In P2, these sexual terms and notions are symbolically represented in order to make the gendered structure appear commonsensical, natural, normal, complementary, and thus innocuous, to the participants in the exchange. However, its post-proverbial other, PP2, unveils the subtle cultural disguise that characterizes P2 by incorporating, expressly and unceremoniously, the notion of sexual intercourse in its content via the use of the completing clausal expression *lo n ba won n sun*, which means ‘sex women up.’ Besides the candour about gendered sexual ideology that characterizes PP2, also the modern trend of condom usage during sexual intercourse is foregrounded in it, to project the reality of HIV/AIDS. This foregrounding can also be observed in PP6 (‘One cannot insert the penis into the vagina and begin to fear contracting HIV, what is the use of a condom?’). Thus, while P2 and PP2 discursively construct a gendered structure on sexuality that is ideologically grounded in the Yoruba culture, the two proverbs differ in their portrayals of that gendered structure; P2 is subtle, symbolic, and traditional while PP2 is forthright and in this sense more modern.

### Discrimination against women

In the traditional proverbs and their post-proverbial versions in this study, sexism was another discursively represented ideology. The forms of sexism expressed in the two sets of proverbs included verbal molestation and denigration of women, which can be described as

linguistic violence against women. In P2 and PP2, women are metaphorically likened to *ope* (palm trees), which anybody can climb. Thus, women are symbolically and ideologically represented as objects that men can possess for their own sexual pleasure. This objectification of women implies the usefulness of women albeit in an inferior capacity.

Likewise, in P3 and PP3, the metaphoric use of *enu* (mouth), *ara* (body), *idi* (buttock), and *abe/obo* (vagina) implies women to have a tendency to be loquacious, gluttonous, and promiscuous. In saying that these parts of women should be covered, the proverbial discourse foregrounds women’s looseness in these aspects and the need to keep them in check. However, while both P3 and PP3 discursively degrade women, P3 is subtle and witty in its approach while PP3 is direct and unpretentious. The use of *abe* in P3 denotatively means ‘under’ but symbolically represents the vagina (*obo*), which PP3 expressly states.

Women’s promiscuity is also foregrounded in P4, P7, P8, and P9 as well as in their post-proverbial others PP4, PP7, PP8, and PP9. However, while a wife’s infidelity is excoriated in P4 and the blame for it placed squarely on the wife-offender, the post-proverbial version places the blame rather on the offender’s husband, by citing his inability to satisfy his wife sexually as the primary cause of the wife’s infidelity. There is thus a subtle ideological gender shift in PP4. By blaming men for their wives’ marital infidelity, PP4 rises to the defence of women and thus transgresses the boundaries of the typical ideological gendered structure that only tends to blame women. Likewise, in P9 and PP9, by using the term *idan* (clitoris), there is a special focus on female circumcision. However, while P9 argues in support of female circumcision as a necessity to curb women’s promiscuous tendency, PP9 frowns against it and labels it female genital mutilation (FGM). Thereby,

the modern viewpoint of FGM is introduced in PP9 to criticize the practice of female circumcision, signifying an ideological shift in the gender view.

### Resistance to discrimination against women

Discursive resistance to discrimination against women was another notable ideological feature in the proverbial discourse. In P10, women's vulnerability to sex-related acts of deception is implied, at the same time as the proverb is discursively resistant to such deceptions in that it expressly states women to be able to fall victim to sexual deception only once. This discursive resistance performs two rhetorical functions. It reveals the workings of power that disadvantage and disempower women in the Yoruba social order while simultaneously resisting the social order by denouncing women's continued vulnerability to men's sexual advances. However, this proverb's post-proverbial other PP10 expressly subverts its original. The completing clausal expression *eyi ti ko smart niyen* signifies men's (and especially smart men's) continued dominance over women, as well as women's continued vulnerability and subservience to men. Therefore, PP10 is an outright subversion of P10, foregrounding as it does women's continued disempowerment in the Yoruba social order.

Unlike P10 and PP10 that show a difference in content, P11 and PP11 are similar in content. The lexis *gan lese*, which means 'punches', in both P11 and PP11 depicts physical violence against women while the clausal expression *eni dobo lekan to gan lese* ('he who has sex once and punches the vagina') implies women's vulnerability to sexual assault. The discursive working of asymmetrical gender relations is represented in both P11 and PP11 to resist such relations in the Yoruba culture. The completing clauses in P11 (*oko*

*re a le*, or 'his penis will soon become erect again') and PP11 (*o ti lowo asewo lowo ni*, or 'he has money to patronize prostitutes') subtly foreground women's indispensability to men, especially in sexual matters. However, the discursive resistance in PP11 has a modern undertone in that it expressly draws into the proverbial discourse the role of commercial sex workers in contemporary times.

Of significance is the fact that the discursively resistant mode in these proverbs implies a form of subtle contest between two genders. It can, therefore, be inferred that Yoruba proverbial discourses do not just portray gendered ideological structures; they also show how such gender asymmetries are resisted in the Yoruba social order through proverbial modalities.

### Discussion

Above, the 10 sex-related Yoruba proverbs in this research and their post-proverbial versions were first presented in a table format to delineate their semantic differences. This was closely followed by a feminist critical discourse analysis of both the proverbs and the post-proverbials, in order to illuminate ideological gender structures in the two sets of proverbs and to discover any ideological shifts manifested by the post-proverbial discourse.

Three basic ideological gender structures were found in the proverbial discourse: discursive construction of binary gender role distinctions, discrimination against women, and resistance to discrimination. Although both the traditional proverbs and their post-proverbial versions exhibited these features, some major ideological gender shifts could be observed specifically in the post-proverbials. For instance, the objection to female genital mutilation in PP9, the foregrounding of the modern trend of sex commercialization in PP11, and the incorporation of the utilitarian

role of condoms in the proverbial discourse in PP2 all signify the post-proverbials' ideological shift away from older notions' more traditional understandings to more modern ones, thereby giving the post-proverbials a distinctly modern undertone.

Moreover, while most of the sex-related Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial others in this study revealed an ideological binary gendered structure, a couple of post-proverbials (e.g., PP2 and PP3) eschewed the subtleness and implicitness characteristic of typical sex-related Yoruba proverbs. By replacing *abe* ('under') in P3 with *obo* ('vagina') in PP3, the post-proverbial abandoned the implicitness and denseness of the traditional proverb. In a similar vein, in PP2 the dependent clausal expression *lo n ba won sun* (which depicts sexual intercourse) betokened a radical ideological shift from the euphemistic and symbolic stance portrayed in the P2, by using the expression *ni i gun* ('to climb'), which implies sexual intercourse.

In addition, the attempt in PP4 to shift the blame of marital infidelity from the wife-offender to her husband represents an ideological gender shift. In many cultures, women who commit adultery are castigated while the men with whom they commit adultery are exonerated. This is seen in P4, which states that any man "who sleeps with one's wife should not be blamed; the wife should be warned instead." However, PP4's aversion to its original proverbial version (P4) marks a gender-based ideological stance of solidarity with women.

In view of all this, we may conclude that the sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials in this study exhibited certain definite ideological gender shifts compared to their traditional versions. Two major ways of manifesting such shifts could be noted in particular. Firstly, the examined post-proverbials tilted towards modernity to eschew the archaism of traditional proverbs. Secondly, they were more blunt, direct, and less opaque than their traditional others. Yet, even

though some of the post-proverbials exhibited a marked gender-based ideological stance of solidarity with women, they still embraced the asymmetrical gender relations characterizing most of the traditional proverbs.

## Conclusion

Using feminist critical discourse analysis, this article has examined a group of sex-related Yoruba proverbs with their post-proverbial others, in order to determine their semantic differentials, identify and compare their ideological gender structures, and identify any ideological gender shifts visible in the post-proverbial versions of the proverbs.

The findings from the study reveal both the traditional sex-based Yoruba proverbs and their post-proverbial others to be largely sexist, in that the two proverbial sets discursively represent forms of sexism that include verbal molestation, objectification, and denigration of women, which can all be described as linguistic violence against women. However, some major gender-based ideological shifts could be observed in the post-proverbials. These included: an ideological tilt towards gender-related contemporary notions like female genital mutilation, condom use, and the reality of HIV/AIDS, giving the post-proverbials a non-traditional and innovative undertone; a radical ideological shift away from the euphemistic and symbolic stance of traditional sex-based proverbs and towards a blunt and direct stance; and a gender-based ideological shift towards a discursive stance of solidarity with women.

All in all, while sex-related Yoruba post-proverbials outwardly act as "playful blasphemies" of their original versions, their assimilation of valuable gender-based modern notions like FGC, the reality of HIV/AIDS, and the utilitarian role of condom likely reflects subtle but significant shifts in Yoruba culture towards more feminist values.

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