

Gender Equality: A Truth Semantic Analysis of Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

by

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Abstract

The contest for equality between men and women in the social domain has remained at the front burner of social interaction as well as academic inquiry for quite a while now. The place of theatre in helping to find answers to the burning question of gender equality cannot be discountenanced. However, the establishment of the truth-value that is at the base of this contest has not been critically pursued. This paper thus sets out to establish the truth-value of the proposition: men and women are created equal as asserted in the play *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, by Ola Rotimi through one of the female characters, Liza. Employing the Tarskian truth conditional semantics theory as modified by Kempson (1977), it is found that the conditions within the text in its process of conflict resolution positively affirm the truth-value of the proposition. However, the application of the conditions prevalent within the Nigerian social milieu negates the same assertion in all its ramifications.

Key Words: Gender equality, Tarskian truth conditional semantics, Truth-value, Ola Rotimi, Nigerian society, Socialist theatre

Introduction

Language is a communication code or what can be referred to as a channel of communication (cf. Medina, 2005; Miller, 1951, Wardhaugh, 2006). Language also encapsulates the meaning which is interpreted by the decoder for the process of communication to become complete (cf. Suleiman, 2000). Moreover, it is only when there is a correct interpretation of the message that an effective interlocution has been achieved (Daniel, 2015a). Thus, to Heath (1992:30), language becomes “a pragmatic instrument” of communication. Moreover, Montaner (1992: 164) thinks it does more than that. To him, “language is much more than a way to communicate”. But obviously, language can effectively help to communicate to bring important changes to the social scene.

In *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* (*Our Husband* henceforth), it seems that Ola Rotimi attempts to both communicate and engage in social engineering (cf. Okafor, 1990). In the text in question, the playwright chooses to use a very public medium like the theatre to present his art. Probably, this is an attempt to make his work much more accessible and more effective (cf. Daniel, 2012; Tobrize, 1998). In using the theatre, we seem to be faced with a cultural structure in the class of the television and the cinema.

As Roger Fowler (1971: 8) argues, “the form sentences [messages] assume reflects such factors as the topic of conversation ... the speaker’s relationship to his audience ... his intention ...” (the parenthesis is added). What this suggests in the context of Ola Rotimi’s intention and purpose in the use of the theatre is to make some move at social change (Banham, 2000, 2002). It appears that he has the idea of correcting wrong notions and attitudes about and towards women in the society (Okafor, 1990). The intention in this study, however, is to find out if such notions and attitudes truly exist in the first place. Some may wonder why such an inquiry considering all the hullabaloo going on around concerning the gender contest and the prominence of the woman question, even to the point of a United Nations organised international conference on the issue in 1995 (cf. Daniel, 2008; Friedlander, 1996; Lazreg, 2004). It could be assumed that the contest might have basically been based on mere assumptions of women oppression in the first place. Daniel (2008) seems to suggest this on the surface of it. The need to ascertain the basics concerning this gender equality struggle cannot be wished away; it is where the question should have arisen in the first place.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs the Tarskian truth conditional semantics to analyse the proposition that seems pivotal to the message of the text. The proposition is that “men and women are created equal”. In the Tarskian theory, a proposition is true only if the conditions around it are true. The theory states that:

S is true if and only if P. (Kempson, 1977: 23), Where S is the name of the sentence or proposition and P the condition which guarantees the truth of that sentence or proposition. Thus: *Snow is white* is true if and only if snow is white. Or *Ade is a man* is true if and only if Ade is a man.

The theory has raised a lot of arguments and counter arguments (cf. Callaway, 1988; Lepore, 2014). For this reason, Davidson, Alfred Tarski's student that is believed to have expanded the truth theory into semantics (Lepore, 2014). Davidson has been criticised for his work on truth conditional semantics (see Callaway, 1988 for an extensive critique). Nonetheless, our choice of this theoretical frameworks fits the intention in this study. The focus is to ascertain the truth value of the proposition in focus.

Essentially, truth conditional semantics is about logicity. It seeks to understand the basis of the truth expressed in a proposition. It expresses the truth when the conditions around it has been satisfied. As Nouwen notes, it hangs on the satisfaction of the possibility of the world matching the proposition being conveyed (Nouwen, 2011). Truth conditional semantics is thus believed to be rooted in the philosophical traditions of logic (Lepore, 2014). Loar (1982) asserts that understanding actually generates truth conditions. Nevertheless, this understanding should be based on the knowledge of the real world where such a proposition will be realised and interpreted by the interlocutors.

It need to be mentioned that the Kempson's (1977) modification of the Tarskian truth conditional theory is adopted here. To her, the sufficiency of the surrounding conditions may not be enough to guarantee the truth-value of a proposition. Necessity and sufficiency are important to restrict the semantic rule to a more definite focus of operation. It is important that necessary conditions be fulfilled in order for the truth value of a proposition to be established. This is considered to be relevant to the analysis as a look at the macro-conditions beyond the text in the discussion below exemplify. In this paper, the conditions within the world of the proposition need to be fully met for the proposition to be considered as having truth value. This is applied at both micro-textual and macro-social levels in the analytical procedure engaged below.

The Kempson model is presented subsequently: necessarily S is true if and only if P; necessarily *Ade is a man* is true if and only if Ade is a man.

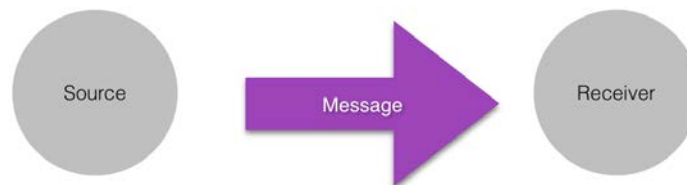
Therefore, 'Ade' must necessarily be the name of a person and the person must necessarily possess the qualities (+male), (+adult), which componentially (Lyons, 1977) describes the word 'man' in the natural language. This is the only sufficient condition to guarantee the truth of the propositions 3 and 5 above. To then arrive at the truth-value of the proposition *Men and women are created equal*, the conditions guaranteeing its truth must necessarily be sufficient for it to be true.

The Problem

The question then is, are these conditions available in the text under consideration to do this? Fowler (1971: 17) observes that “it is of course to be admitted that ‘the text’ provides best evidence of its own structure ...” This analysis is approached cautiously on this ground because one is aware that “... it can’t be seriously claimed that texts are utterly independent of contexts, or that their contexts are not relevant to understanding them” (Fowler, 1971).

Moreover, the communication relevance of this study presumes the text to be interacting outside itself for a purpose (cf. Daniel, 2015a). By invoking the communication model presented below, the playwright becomes the encoder/source and the text, code/message while audience/readers become the decoder/receiver. In this sense, context cannot be under-estimated as an essential interpretational device.

Figure 1: The basic communication model



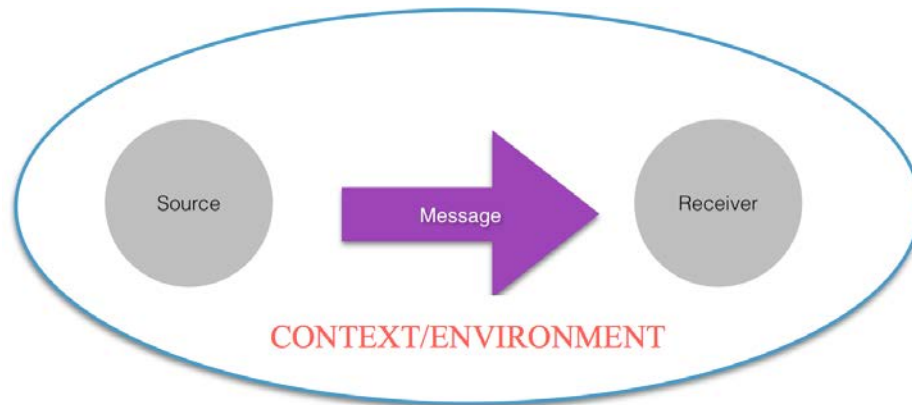
(Adapted from Daniel, 2015b)

Ward (1989: 6) observes that:

Communication takes place within a ‘shared environment’ in that the participants in the process live within social, linguistic, physical and temporal frameworks which are in turn mediated to the participants through the messages circulating in the system.

It becomes obvious that no truth of a proposition such as that under investigation can be established without reference to the conditions prevalent beyond the text. Moreover, we should not forget that the text itself is an ‘environment’ and the larger context of the world, the Nigerian society, is the ‘bigger environment’. Both have consideration in this paper. In this case, the communication model above will require context as its bigger environment. This could be represented as a modified form like this:

Figure 2: The context-directed communication model



The Data

The data used in this paper is an extract from the play by Ola Rotimi, a renowned Nigerian playwright and theatre practitioner (Banham, 2000; Odebunmi, 2008). Essentially, the play seems like a farcical comedy on the surface. Some will actually describe it as one (cf. Okafor, 1990; Olateju & Yusuf, 2006). Nonetheless, a serious and critical consideration of the issues raised in this play show that it is not as thin in substance as it would appear (see Waters, 2000 for a difference of opinion). It discusses the foibles of the Nigerian politicians in the First Republic. It throws up the issue of the Nigerians participation in the Congolese civil war in the mid-20th century. In addition, the issue of marital unfaithfulness by Nigerian men, the taken-for-granted polygamous marriages, are raised (cf. Daniel, 2008). The economic and social reasons for the practice of levirate marriages within the Nigerian society are of importance in looking at the success of this slim play. One cannot forget the marriages contracted for political exigencies in the current political dispensation in Nigeria. Ola Rotimi's perceptiveness could be seen in this as Nigerian top politicians continue to practice marriage of convenience, even in the 21st century, with the full cooperation of their spouses and children.

The Story

Our Husband is the story of a cocoa farmer turned politician. It is a comedy of manners that clearly shows the idiosyncrasies of Nigerian men and politicians (Olateju & Yusuf, 2006). It reveals a situation in which men that rule the world through their oppressive and power self-allocation have to bow to the dictates of women that learnt to assert their rights, authority and self for political negotiations. Many of the scenes in the play suggest that men make use of women for their end for as long as women continue to agree to be used (cf. Kinoti, 2011).

At the end, when women realised that, with their number, they could negotiate and determine the part they play in political outcomes, they asserted themselves and took over political power. Sikira, the former wife of Lejoka-Brown, becomes the new candidate of the party as he (Lejoka-Brown) became discredited as wanting in the requirements of a political leader to lead the party to victory. Madam Ajanaku appeared to have just realised that the political marriage to his daughter was exploitative. Moreover, the other members of the party now acknowledge that Lejoka-Brown's ways are crude and not likely to be of positive impact on their party's fortunes at the polls. In addition, the women's ultimatum requires the party leadership re-strategising in order not to lose the market women's support.

In this way, the women were able to overturn the power balance. Through their new consciousness of the power inherent in their numerical strength, they used strategic negotiations to upturn the political force to be reckoned with. All of these grew out of the realisation by the women that without the women's votes, the men-controlled parties are vulnerable to their opponents.

The Author

Ola Rotimi himself could not be denied a pride of place as a successful and insightful writer as many of his works have shown. As subtle as the accusation made against Liza by Lejoka-Brown as a proponent of 'communist manifesto' may seem, it actually describes Ola Rotimi's political and ideological leanings. It would not be far from the truth to state that he was a socialist writer. His works such as *Hopes of the Living Dead, If*, among many others, appear to throw up clearly his ideological and political leanings as the writer of and for the masses.

Okafor (1990) asserts that Ola Rotimi was born as Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi in 13 April, 1938 at Sapele in the present day Delta State. He was born of a Yoruba father and an Ijaw mother. This is said to have impacted on his plays (Banham, 2000, 2002; Okafor, 1990; Encyclopaedia Britannica). He studied in Lagos, Nigeria and later in the USA (Boston University and Yale). He married a French-Canadian, Hazel Mae Gaudreau (Banham, 2000), who was said to be an artiste. According to Okafor (1990), this had strong influence on his perpetual inclusion of music as part of his productions. Banham (2000) opines that Rotimi's whole family was actually involved in his theatrical productions.

His consciousness of rhetorical renderings in his plays was said to have been greatly influenced by his engineer and labour activist father's love of public speaking (Banham, 2000; Okafor, 1990). His love of the arts is ascribed to his mother, who was said to have been a dancer and leader of a dance troupe. However, the claim in Banham (2002) that his mother is Nembe from Rivers State seems to contradict the view in some quarters that his mother is from Sapele in the present Delta State (cf. Banham, 2000; Okafor, 1990). However, it is obvious that this mistake could have arisen from the fact that she is Ijaw.

His bi-ethnic origin also appeared to have had a great influence on the language of his plays as it is said that he could bring into one play up to six different languages and as many as ten as in the case of *Hopes of the Living Dead* (Okafor, 1990). Okafor avows that Rotimi himself spoke not less than six languages; namely, English, Ijaw, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and Pidgin English. In *Our Husband*, one could actually count about four languages in operation, viz: English, Pidgin English, Yoruba and Arabic. The use of colloquial English could be seen as his attempt at reaching his audience in real time. However, Waters (1999) found this objectionable as he avers that it limits the audience that could be reached by Rotimi as well as diminishes the work itself. One could however argue that the use of colloquial English in *Our Husband* perfectly fits its context of political parody and popular political sensitisation; it also aptly characterises the characters in the play as attested to by Okafor (1990).

Of great interest is also the philosophy that guides Ola Rotimi's plays. It cannot be denied that he has socialist sympathies. His tendency to create drama that organises and tries to query the status quo clearly attests to this. In the same vein, the way in which Lejoka-Brown, the consummate politician that is inept is characterised clearly shows Rotimi's disgust with those that want power just for the sake of it and not necessarily for the common good. He laughs at the idiocy of such so-called leaders that cannot even lead the little group put in their care as shown by Lejoka-Brown's inability to lead fair and square in his home. His attempt at deceiving the women in his house and his marrying a woman just for the convenience of obtaining political power easily shows Rotimi's unsympathetic view of the politicians that are only out to exploit the masses.

In addition, his deconstructionist posture of the history of Africa also easily comes to the fore as shown in his historical plays. The plays provide the platform for him to reconstruct historical accounts from the African point of view, using his plays. *Kurunmi* and *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* are examples of such historical plays.

His success as a theatrical director is attested to by Wren (1973) who sees his establishment and leadership style of the Ori Olokun theatre group at the University of Ife as an attestation of the practicality of what his plays preach. Okafor opines that the Crab was created in Port Harcourt as a theatre company to continue the work he started with the Ori Olokun theatre group of Ile Ife, when he started teaching at the University of Port Harcourt.

Odebunmi (2008) identifies the number of Rotimi's plays as seven. These include: *If...A Tragedy of the Ruled*, *Hopes of the Living Dead*, *The Gods are not Blame*, *Holding Talks: An Absurdist Drama*, *Kurunmi*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*. Okafor (1990) asserts that *Hopes of the Living Dead* has only been stage played and yet to be published. However, it appears that it has been published as *Hopes of the Living Dead (The Adventures of Mr. B)* in 1988 by Spectrum Books Ltd as found on Amazon Try Prime (amazon.com: <http://www.amazon.com/dp/9782460133>) and confirmed by Encyclopaedia Britannica in its account of Rotimi's biography. Uwatt (2007) is also the post-humous publishing of Ola Rotimi's two plays as *The Epilogue: Two Unpublished Plays of Ola Rotimi*.

Ola Rotimi died on 18 August, 2000 at the age of 62 (Banham, 2000; 2002; Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2015; Ola Rotimi Foundation, n.d.). However, Odebunmi (2008) asserts that he died in 2002. This becomes questionable when it is considered that the playwright was said to have died at the age of 62 while he was born in 1938. Odebunmi however never mentioned the age when he died nor the date when he was born. It is however clear that the date he gave would probably have been a mistake as most other sources agreed that the playwright cum director/university teacher died in the year 2000.

The Proposition: Men and Women Are Created Equal

The immediate context leading to this statement arises from Liza, Rahman Lejoka-Brown's legally married wife, expressing her frustrations at the unfaithfulness of 'their' husband to the marital vows they shared years ago in Congo to her 'sister-in-marriage', Sikira.

The Text

Liza (losing control): Well it goes to prove that Mr. Rahman Lejoka-Brown does not have any respect whatsoever for my feelings. Why, I believe a woman must try to be a loving, loyal wife and all that. On the other hand, the husband must try to show some respect for the wife. After all, when we boil it down, men and women are all created equal.

Sikira: I like that.

Liza: Like what?

Sikira: Men and women are created equal.

Liza: Of course, we are all created equal. Why, there is nothing so strange about that fact – even though most men fail to accept it ... (page 54)

The proposition that *Men and women are created equal* marks a turning point for womanhood in the play. The notion that men and women are created equal is a strange proposition to the 'local' traditional African woman exemplified by Sikira and Mama Rashida. This is a 'fact' taken for granted by Liza even though she acknowledges that "... most men fail to accept it ..." (pg. 54). This proposition, of course, becomes the liberating lever for Sikira and also eventually led to the women's political self-assertion and liberation in the play. The consequences of this is seemingly an innocent assertion by Liza in the play are so grievous that one would not be wrong to say that it is the pivot and watershed of the play. It marks the climax of the play.

Analysis and Discussion

Nonetheless, the question to focus on is: Does the proposition, *Men and women are created equal*, possess all the necessary and sufficient conditions to guarantee its truth? Applying the Kempson modified Tarskian formula should be able to unravel this mystery.

1. Necessarily S is true if and only if P where
2. S = Men and Women are created equal
3. P = ?
4. \therefore = *Men and women are created equal* is true if and only if necessarily and sufficiently men and women are created equal.

What does this mean? The idea is that the proposition under consideration is S as in 8. P are the conditions that must be met necessarily and sufficiently for the proposition being asserted in 8 to be truth or have inherent truth-value. Clearly, 10 is a lexical representation of the proposition and its truth conditions. As globally accepted in the practice of mathematical logic, the sign \therefore is lexically represented. This is the expected resultant effect of the proposition meeting the conditions stated as P.

A lexico-semantic commentary on the proposition should help better to yield the desired and objective result in this investigation of the truth-value contained in the assertion that men and women are created equal. The conjunct *and* indicates an equal status for the gender terms *women* and *men* at the deep structure level in the syntactic consideration of the proposition (Chomsky, 1965). At the level of componential analysis of the key terms in the proposition (Kempson, 1977; Lyons, 1977), it is interesting to note that the difference between the terms is basically sexual/gender when a componential analysis is carried out on them. This is outlined below:

- | | |
|----------|---------------------------|
| 5. Men | (+adult) (+plu) (+male) |
| 6. Women | (+adult) (+plu) (+female) |
- (cf. Lyons, 1977)

It seems, from the componential analysis of the nominals in the structure, that the only componential element that may be considered different is the gender of the words being analysed. The two terms represent adulthood and plurality, which actually have to do with the generic nature of the terms. The third element thus shows the men as lacking in femaleness (cf. Daniel, 2008, Spender, 1985 comments on this point). It thus appears that sexuality is the only contentious issue in this proposition.

The predicate structure, *are created equal*, seems to confirm this as it maintains the status of equality at the level of creation, or what may be called divinity (metaphysics). At the level revealed by the internal structure of the proposition, the truth-value of the proposition look to be self-apparent. This is because all children are apparently conceived and born in the same manner, irrespective of their sexes. It may therefore not be far wrong to conclude that they are equal, whether male or female.

However, within the text, *Our Husband*, it is obvious that some other dynamics are operational before this revelation or assertion (proposition) was made by Liza. The wives of Lejoka-Brown were seemingly inconsequential as instances in the play reveal. A few of these instances are presented below:

- A. Lejoka-Brown's non-reply to Sikira's question (pg. 1)
- B. Lejoka-Brown is lord and master to his wives (pp. 1, 6, 23)
- C. Lord seems to be a generic term of address for men as even Mustafa (another [old, poor] male) is also addressed as lord by Mama Rashida (pg. 16)
- D. Lejoka-Brown describes the women as little crickets (which is no doubt derogatory in interntion) (pg. 28)

One could go on and on, but let these few exemplify the point being made here.

Interestingly, considering the resultant effects of this seemingly insignificant revelation, one wonders if the truth-value of the proposition can be disputed. To state that men and women are created equal thus appears as if one is merely stating the obvious. Such consequences in the play as outlined below would thus make the truth-value of the proposition a given.

- a. Sikira becomes bold enough to answer back at her husband for the first time (pg. 57).
- b. Sikira is able to insist on wanting something (the dress that Liza sewed for her) and wanting her husband to respect her wish to have her way because she desires that object (pg. 57).
- c. Sikira is able to walk out of a 'marriage', which she had always known was originally contracted to fulfil her husband's selfish political ambition and not for their mutual love and interest (pp. 10 and 59). She now has agency of self-determinism.
- d. Sikira becomes psychologically liberated enough to imagine women being elected as *Prime Ministers*.
- e. Sikira is able to mobilize the women to exercise their political will and power to gain access to the centre-stage of the power game. She has become an agent of political change (compare Captain Ara Sharp in Oyedepo, 2002).
- f. Sikira eventually becomes the leading candidate of the party, which the husband was previously heading.

- g. Mama Rashida obtains economic power through hard work and the application of the economic theories that Liza taught her.
- h. Mama Rashida becomes liberated by this power, which frees her from her economic dependence on Lejoka-Brown.
- i. Importantly, Liza's educational success is not a favour but an achievement, which makes her equal to any man in the medical field.
- j. This success also possibly gives her (Liza) the psychological liberation she exhibited in making this assertion in the proposition on female/male equality in the first place.

Considering all these, it would appear that, within the world of the text, all the necessary and sufficient conditions to establish the truth-value of the proposition on gender equality have been met. The possible world has been established and appears to exist as real (Nouwen, 2011). In this wise, the proposition that men and women are created equal is a truism within the world existing in the drama. Thus, given the same exposure and opportunity, women and men are created equal. Obviously, this seems to be the message of Ola Rotimi to his Nigerian society.

As has been noted by Fowler (1971) above, the world to be considered in the art of the artist goes beyond the work itself. He notes that contexts are part of the consideration of any text. In this vein, the macro-context of the text represented by the Nigerian society becomes relevant.

Looking at the macro-context of the play, the text becomes quite utopic and extraordinarily unrealistic. The Nigeria of the 60s and even now in the 21st century seems not quite the place where women can easily take over political power and dictate the terms of their affiliation. There seems to be much evidence to show that the Nigeria of then and now is still very much discriminatory against women (cf. Daniel, 2008, 2012; Denney, 2011, Kinoti, 2011). Situations of some women are almost as bad as the case of Sikira and Mama Rashida before Liza's advent (cf. James, 1998; Musa, 1997). This can be seen in the continued abuse of women in the Nigerian society.

The worsening case of women trafficking and women being sold into slavery remains a persistent source of worry to women activist. The case of the kidnapped Chibok girls that remains a mystery after the worldwide outcry a year and half after is another issue. Even the issue as a campaign slogan by the new Nigerian government did not provide the magic wand of producing the girls as promised in its campaign before the elections that brought it into power. The suspicion that they might have been sold into sex slavery is the sad truth that everyone in the country is afraid to face.

As also shown by the analysis of women participants in the Nigerian 2015 general elections, the percentage of the women that were elected went below even that of the 2011 elections. Ndujihe, Oke and Ekwe (2011) give the percentages of women in the National Assembly for 2003 and 2007. The percentages for 2003 were put at 2.7% for House of Reps and Senate is 5% while that of 2007 has 8.25% and 7.22% respectively. 2011 result also shows the performance of women in the National Assembly as 7.5% and 8.3% for the two chambers respectively.

The INEC 2015 result has 3.9% and 5.6% for House of Reps and Senate respectively. It will appear that the 2007 and 2011 mark the peak of women presence in the National Assembly in Nigeria. This was followed by decline as evident by the 2015 general elections result (sourced from the INEC website by the researcher) as seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Percentages of Women Elected Representation in Nigeria Parliament

Year	House of Representative	Senate	Total
2003	2.7	5	7.7
2007	8.25	7.22	15.47
2011	7.5	8.3	15.8
2015	3.9	5.6	9.5
Total	22.35	26.12	48.47

Daniel (2015) asserts that the number of women in elective positions in Nigeria is disturbingly few. As she observes, politics is a game of number. This fact was duly exploited by the market women in the play but it is yet to be effective in the larger Nigerian society as shown in Table 1 above.

All these suggest that in the macro-context, the proposition that men and women are created equal is yet to have sufficient conditions necessary for its being true. This is despite the social advancement since the play was written in the 1960s and women's persistent insistence on gender mainstreaming. This is the contention of Spender (1985) and the finding of Daniel (2008). Thus, it is concluded that the proposition proves the concept of gender equality is fallacious in the Nigerian society even though it appears true within the world of the text.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to show that the communication process can also reveal a lot about social engineering. In investigating the truth-value of the idea of gender equality as presented by Ola Rotimi in his play *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*, it becomes obvious that the text possesses a utopic gender framework, which gives positive truth-value to the proposition that *Men and women are created equal*. Nonetheless, the truth-conditional semantics fails to give the same sort of value to the proposition in the mega society involving the writer, the text and the expected audience in that the Nigerian society still operates a most contrary condition to that of the text. The women do not have the same hold on political power in order to determine the leading candidacy of the major political parties in Nigeria. In addition, the level of women political representation in Nigerian's current political dispensation is still relatively low. The idea of woman president is still far from the imagination as the votes that women candidates in Nigeria continue to garner remain insignificant in the total.

It could thus be concluded that, while in the text, the proposition that men and women are created equal is found to be true, outside the dramatic text, the same proposition is found to be fallacious and unrealistic; at least, at the level beyond the meta-physical. This establishes the fact that within the Nigerian society, gender equality could still be considered a fallacy within the logical semantics. The Tarskian truth-conditional semantics clearly reveals this fact.

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