

# Proverbs and Anti-proverbs in Ọladejọ Okediji's *RéRé Rún*: A Marxist Perspective

Lere ADEYEMI

Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages  
University of Ilorin (Nigeria).  
adeyemiolalere@yahoo.com

Recibido: 11-05-2012 | Aceptado: 08-06-2012

**Abstract**  
A great deal of linguistics and literary studies have been carried out by prominent paremiologists and paremiographers. However, enough attention is yet to be paid in Yorùbá proverb scholarship to anti-proverbs and their use in literature. It would seem that most anti-proverbs are one day wonders in that they might never enter general folk speech by gaining a certain currency and traditionality. Notwithstanding, the way some Yòrùbá creative writers make use of anti-proverbs as rhetorical devices express new wisdom and innovation. This paper examined the use of anti-proverbs in Ọladejọ Okediji's *RéRé Rún* within the Marxist theory. Among the findings in the work were that anti-proverbs in *RéRé Rún* not only elicit humour, but they add colour and beauty to the language use. Anti-proverbs were also used to stimulate critical consciousness in the readers to fight for their rights but with wisdom. The conclusion of the paper was that the conscious manipulation of the so-called fixed proverbs could generate new proverbs, encourage creativity in the writers and expose hidden meanings of proverbs.

**Keywords**  
Paremiology.  
Anti-proverb.  
Literature.  
Yorùbá.  
Ọladejọ  
Okediji.

**Título: «Paremiyas y antiparemiyas en Ọladejọ Okediji's *RéRé Rún*: Una perspective marxista».**

**Resumen**  
Eminentes paremiólogos y paremiógrafos han llevado a cabo numerosos estudios lingüísticos y literarios, pero todavía no se ha prestado suficiente atención a la investigación sobre las paremiyas en lengua yorùbá, a las antiparemiyas y su uso en la literatura. Se podría pensar que la mayoría de las antiparemiyas son flor de un día que quizá nunca se incorporen al habla popular a través de la generalización de su uso y la incorporación a la tradición. No obstante, la manera en la que algunos escritores yorùbá hacen uso de las antiparemiyas como recursos retóricos transmite nueva sabiduría e innovación. En este artículo se examina el uso de las antiparemiyas en la obra *RéRé Rún*, de Ọladejọ Okediji en el marco de la teoría marxista. Entre otros resultados de este estudio, encontramos que las antiparemiyas de *RéRé Rún* no son solo causa de humor sino que incorporan color y belleza al lenguaje utilizado; las antiparemiyas también se utilizan para estimular la conciencia crítica de los lectores para luchar por sus derechos con la sabiduría popular. La conclusión de este estudio es que la manipulación consciente de las llamadas paremiyas fijas podría dar lugar a nuevas paremiyas, fomentar la creatividad de los autores y mostrar significados ocultos de las paremiyas.

**Palabras clave**  
Paremiología.  
Antiparemia.  
Literatura.  
Yorùbá.  
Ọladejọ  
Okediji.

**Titre: «Parémies et anti-parémies en Ọladejọ Okediji's *RéRé Rún* : une perspective marxiste».**

**Résumé**  
D'éminents parémiologues et parémiographes ont réalisé de nombreux études linguistiques et littéraires, mais la recherche parémiologique en langue yorùbá est encore négligée : les parémies, les anti-parémies et son usage dans la littérature. On pourrait croire que les antiparémies sont la fleur d'un jour et qu'elles ne seront jamais intégrées dans la langue populaire par la généralisation de leur usage et de leur incorporation à la tradition. Pourtant, l'usage que certains écrivains yorùbá font des antiparémies comme recours rhétoriques, transmet une nouvelle sagesse et innovation.

**Mots-clés**  
Phraseologie.  
Anti-parémie.  
Littérature.  
Yorùbá.  
Ọladejọ  
Okediji.

Dans cet article, on examine l'usage des antiparémies dans l'ouvrage *RéRé Rún*, d'Ọladejọ Okediji, dans le cadre de la théorie marxiste. Entre autres résultats de cette étude, nous remarquons que les antiparémias de *RéRé Rún* n'introduisent pas seulement de l'humour mais aussi de la couleur et de la beauté au langage employé ; les antiparémies sont aussi employées pour réveiller la conscience critique des lecteurs afin qu'ils luttent pour leurs droits en s'inspirant de la sagesse populaire. Cette étude arrive à cette conclusion: la manipulation consciente des parémies pourrait créer de nouvelles parémies, promouvoir la créativité des auteurs et montrer les signifiés cachés des parémies.

## INTRODUCTION

**E**reative writers world over are generally conscious of the importance of the use of language. Eagleton (1996: 2) states that: «perhaps literature is definable not according to whether it is fictional or “imaginative”, but because it uses language in peculiar ways». Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language. Every creative writer in Yorùbá society is admired and judged as competent or otherwise on the basis of his/her use of «quality» Yorùbá language (i.e language full of proverbs and other rhetorical devices). To write a good Yorùbá play, novel or poetry, just having a captivating story is not enough, adequate use of aesthetic ornaments is required. The Yorùbá people love rhetoric, and writers who have deep knowledge of Yoruba idioms and proverbs are treated with respect.

An average Yorùbá reader responds with delight when creative works (poetry, drama, novel and lately Yorùbá films) are saturated with traditional Yorùbá proverbs and other rhetorical devices. The legendary Yorùbá novelist, D. O. Fagunwa is still regarded till date as the «master of Yorùbá language» because of his use of proverbs and other figures of speech in his novels. Soyinka (2010), in his preface to *In the Forest of Olódumarè A Translation of D.O.Fagunwa's Igbo Olódumarè*, states that «the most famous and enduring of Fagunwa's works, most readers will agree is *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irunmọle*» (p.1). This is because of the high level of Fagunwa's use of Yorùbá language in the novel, a novel that starts with a proverb and ends with a proverb is indeed a master piece. Fagunwa starts with this statement in *Ogboju Ode*:

Èyin ọrẹ mi, bí ọwe bí ọwe ni à n lu ìlù ogidigbo, ọlọgbón ní jó o, ọmọràn ni sì í mò ọn. Itàn tí n ó sọ yí ilù ogidiigbo ni, emi ni ẹni ti yóò lu ilù náà, ẹyin ni ọlọgbón ti yóò jó o, ẹyin si ni ọmọràn ti yóò mò ọn pẹlú (p.1)

[My friends all, like the sonorous proverb do we drum the ogidiigbo, it is the wise who dance to it, and the learned who understands its language. The story which follows is veritable Ogidigbo; it is I who will drum it, and you the wise heads who will interpret it] (Trans: Soyinka, 2010: 1)

Bamgbose (1974:108) revised in (2007) attests to the greatness of Fagunwa based on his use of sweet language. He says: «Fagunwa's main claim to greatness as a Yorùbá novelist is his language... Fagunwa is a master of the Yorùbá language. He twists it in his own way to express his feelings and those of his characters» (p.108). However, despite the greatness of Fagunwa in his use of Yorùbá language, he merely followed the traditional convention and «there is no originality at all in the proverbs selected or used in his novels» (Bamgbose, 1974: 120).

Işola (1978, p.190) classifies all other Yorùbá major writers apart from Fagunwa into three groups on their use of language, especially proverbs. According to him; «some are mere story tellers who use mainly casual language, there are others with mixed styles sometimes very casual and sometimes brilliant and there are a few of them who creatively exploit the genius of the language». He identifies Adebayo Faleti and Ọladejọ Okediji as belonging to the genius category in their use of Yorùbá language and especially Yorùbá proverbs. Barber (1995) classifies Ọladejọ Okediji in the second generation Yorùbá writers, comprising «the writers of

the 1960's and 1970's like Akinwunmi Iṣṣola, Kọla Akinlade and Afọlabi Oḷabintan and others». (p.14). Ogunsina (2006) groups Oḷadeḷo Okediji among modern writer of detective and thriller novels, «whose works are characterized by a conscious effort to deviate from the general pattern of the Fagunwa tradition». Adeyemi (2010: 92) locates Okediji among Yorùbá contemporary realist writers. They attempt a depiction of man in society and a reflection of contemporary Yorùbá life in particular and Nigerian life in general. The settings of his works cross borders they are no longer restricted to Yorùbá society but to the whole country and the global community. However, realistic events and marvellous episodes are placed side by side in most of his works. Oḷadeḷo Okediji has written many novels, plays and other non-fictions. Some of his major novels are *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*, *Àjà ló lẹrù*, *Atótó Arére*, *Ògá ni Búkólá*, *Opa Agbeleka*, *Binú Tírí*, *Ka rìn ká pọ* (all novels). He has three plays to his credit namely: *Réré Rún*, *Sàngó and Aájò Ajé*. The use of proverbs is very important in all the literary works of Okediji. It is not for nothing that he himself makes a deliberate mention of proverb device in the acknowledgement to his second novel *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*. He says:

Láti igbà ti iwé mi àkókó ti jade ni àwọn òrẹ mi gbogbo ti n kọ mi ni òwe oríṣíríṣi, láimọ pé àwọn n kọ mi. bi wọn ti n bá mi sọrọ ni mo n feti si òwe ti wọn n pa...]

[Since when my first novel was published, many of my friends have unconsciously been teaching me different types of proverbs. As they talk with me I listen to the proverbs that they use...]

From this statement, it could be deduced that Okediji's use of numerous proverbs in all his creative works is deliberate. It indicates that he believes that Yorùbá proverbs are potent vehicles of communication. No wonder, Okediji uses proverbs as tools that provide vividness and emotionality of speech among all the characters and actors in his works. All the literary products (plays, novels) of Okediji are saturated with proverbs, and Yorùbá literary critics have thoroughly scanned his use of proverbs. His incredible ability to manipulate the Yorùbá proverbs, to bend them to his wishes and change the structure or create new proverbs is noticeable especially in his drama. However, to the best of our knowledge no attention has been paid to Okediji's proverbs and anti-proverbs in his plays. A lot of work has been done by eminent scholars on Okediji's novels and his use of language but till date no critical work exists on his use of anti proverbs in *Réré Rún*. This paper is to fill gap and adds to the existing critical works on Okediji's literary works. The purpose of this paper therefore is to examine within the Marxist perspective the deployment of Yorùbá proverbs and anti-proverbs in *Réré Rún*.

## 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MARXIST THEORY

The Marxist theory has become a full blown theory on its own from the theory of sociology of literature. The sociology of literature states that what is expressed in oral or written literature finds practical application in real life. Both sociology and literature study man and the society. While sociology adopts the scientific method to analyse the society, literature adopts literary language as tool, but the focus of both is man in his society.

Marxist theory like feminism and postcolonialism continue to ask the most challenging questions within the discipline of literary study: what is the relationship between literature and society? Does literary value exist and if so in what? (Haslett, 1999: 99). Marxism argues that all points of view are socially determined, but it does not entail that all points of view are equal in value. It asserts that certain inequalities- such as class exploitation and poverty- will always be «wrong». Also, literature in the Marxist perspective is more than being a product of the society. It plays an important part in shaping or crystallizing the views about the world, men, and the society. For example, the perception of the Yorùbá people on every aspect of their life is reflected and refracted in their literary works. Through literature, the people give expression to

their attitudes to the situation around them and their attitudes to such situation are shaped and conveyed by their literary works.

Marxism also attempts to reveal the ways in which our socio-economic system is the ultimate source of our experience, and that class structures lead to resistance and conflicts, and these conflicts will always be reflected in literature and other forms of expression-(art, music, and movies), etc. Though a staggering number of different nuances exist within this school of literary theory, Marxist critics generally work in areas covered by the following questions:

1. Whom does it benefit if the work or effort is accepted?
2. What is the social class of the author?
3. Which class does the work claim to represent?
4. What values does it reinforce?
5. What values does it subvert?
6. What conflict can be seen between the values the work champion and those it portrays?
7. How do the characters from different classes interact or conflict?

We shall use the questions as interpretative tools as they affect the use of proverbs and anti-proverbs in *Réré Rún*. This will help us to think more deeply and insightfully about the use of Yorùbá proverbs in disseminating crucial information for the readers.

## 2. THE PLOT CONSTRUCT OF *RÉRÉ RÚN*

The story centres on the workers and the employers of labour in a town called Imogun. It is a big city with Onímògún and his team of chiefs. The workers are diligent and strong. They work like horses but they eat like beetles. They do the work of elephants but are paid the salary of rats. They work for gold but they are paid with mud. Workers in Imogun are never balanced. Most of them do not have access to three square meals a day while they find it difficult to pay the school fees of their wards and children. To alleviate their sufferings, they form a workers' union led by Lawuwo. The workers demand for increase in salary and ask the government to reduce the high tax. The management team comprises the King, Onimogun, Olúgbón, Balogun, Aṛesa and Akòwé Àgbà (the secretary). Lawuwo is arrested and detained. The workers come together to protest against the detention of Lawuwo. They employ a lawyer and contribute money to fight against the employers whom they regard as oppressors and exploiters.

The council infiltrates the worker's union and plants Ìdowu to be the «eye» of the council. The council persuades Lawuwo to compromise. They offer him a new house, car and higher position. As they show him the new house and cars they take his photograph. The samples of the picture were used by Ìdowu to blackmail Lawuwo, the agony of the workers and the collapse of the union constitute the plot of the play that ends in tragedy.

## 3. THE USE OF PROVERBS IN THE PLAY.

Okediji uses proverbs and anti-proverbs in *Réré Rún* not only as aesthetic ornaments but as narrative techniques for highlighting themes, portraying actors (characters) constructing plot and depicting settings. *Réré Rún* is a fictional portrayal of the condition of workers in a capitalist economy. In Imogun, which is the setting of the play, workers live in penury, they work like horses but they receive starvation salary. The society of Imogun is divided into three classes, the upper class led by the Onímògún and his chiefs, Aṛesa, Olúgbón and Balógun. They are the employers of labour. They regard the workers as extension of machines, so the workers union led by Lawuwo constitutes the lower class while Mopelọla and Akòwé àgbà are representatives of the middle class. Onímògún believes in the repression of workers, and does

not tolerate freedom of speech. His chiefs meet to discuss how to resolve the impending strike of workers. Olúgbón starts the discussion with a proverb:

Olúgbón: kò runni, kò runni, o máa sì n' dọ̀yì ká nì o. Báà bá tètè Peetan irókò, bó ba fi dàgbà tán, apá kò ma sì ní ká a mó (oi:10)

[It is not dangerous, it is not dangerous yet, it moves round in circumlocution, if the branches of an Iroko tree are not quickly cut, and it grows, it becomes unconquerable (p. 10)]

There are two proverbs in the statement of Olúgbón. The second one, «Báà bá tètè peetan irókò, bó ba fi dàgbà tán, apá kò si ní ka a mó», is an anti-proverb. The original proverb is «Bá à bá tètè peetan irókò, bó ba fi dàgbà tán, a máa gbẹ̀bọ̀ lówó ẹ̀ni» [If the stem of an iroko tree is not cut, and it grows up, it will be requesting sacrifices].

The message of Olugbón's proverb is that if the workers are not quickly dealt with, they will become too powerful for the management to tackle. As they were discussing, Onímògún the king and the chairman of the company enters and interrupts the discussion with serial proverbs loaded with invectives:

Onímògún: káàsà, káàsà! Balogun.....àkúkúù joyè, n' jẹ kò ya ju ẹnu mi o kálúù lọ? Ẹ sì wáa sọ ara yín di jẹkúredí kale! Olúgbón, ká fi yín joyè awodí kẹ ẹ má lè gbádiyẹ. Láwúwo sì wá di igi osè mó on yín lówó, ó dàràbà, apá yín ò káa----eni à bá tà, ka fowó rẹ ra àtùpà, igbà tó wa sọ ara rẹ di ajitannawo lóru mó yín lówó yí n' kó! Ọgèdè n' bàjẹ ẹ ló n' pón! Ayé n' tán mó yín lówó, ẹ sì n' woran. Ẹ wa fètè silẹ ẹ n' pa a lalalapa. (oi:11)

[Onímògún: Nonsense, Nonsense! Balogun-----when one is untitled, is it not better than to be a chief than to be and says "I cannot rule the tow; you have devalued yourself! Olúgbón, you are made to be the chief hawk, and you cannot devour the chicken. Lawuwo, has become a big ose tree, you cannot handle him, he has become àràbà tree, you cannot overcome him. Somebody that should have been sold to purchase a lamp, he has now made himself so precious to be searching for in the night, what a pity! The plantain is becoming rotten, and you say it is ripe, your dignity is going, you are just looking. You have left leprosy and start killing the ringworms (p. 11)].

There are six proverbs in the statement of Onímogún. The proverbs show the type of leader, he is. He is a thoroughly merciless king. He does not have pity for the workers. To him the chiefs are too soft and too merciful. He hates any form of opposition. The «hawk», «plantain», osè, àràbà, àjítannawò, ẹ̀tẹ̀ and «lápàlápà» are symbolic and meaningful. The employers of labour should behave like «hawks» while the workers are «chickens, plantain» They must not be allowed to become important or create ideas for ruling class. He continues:

Íwọ Balógun, o gbàgbé pé àgbàlagbà tó ba so àgbàdo módií tí sọ ara rẹ di aláwàdà adiyẹ (oi:12).

[You Balogun, that an elderly person that ties corns round his waist has made himself a mocker to the chickens (hens) (p.12)].

With these proverbs, he closed the discussion and left no space of kindness or mercy in the hearts of council members. Marx (1970) has clearly demonstrated the manner in which the ideologies of the capitalists are extended:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.... The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, grasped as ideas (p.64)

As the story progresses, the employer of labour under the rulership of Onímògún reveals its true entity. The workers operate under economic exploitation and oppression through taxation and forced cheap labour. Onímògún states again:

Baba òlá wọ̀n sẹ̀lú rí? Àwọ̀n ọ̀mọ̀ tálákà. N gbọ ẹ da mi lóhùn, ikún tilẹ̀ ló loko ni àbí tákúté? Ẹ dá mi lóhùn. Ààlò a sejú bàbá ojo ni. Látóni lọ....Kò sí ẹ̀kúnwó kankan mọ̀ fún ọ̀sìsẹ̀ kankan fún ọ̀dún méjì gbáko (oi:15)

[Were there forefathers involved in governance? The offspring's of the poor. Listen and answer me, who owns the farm, is it the squirrel (ikún) or the trap? Answer me. Too much of persuasion is a sign of timidity. As from today, no salary increase for the workers for the next two years (p.15)]

The wickedness of the employers leads the workers to form a union led by Lávúwo. Lávúwo is as poor as the other workers; his life is as wretched as the house rat, he does not belong to a privileged aristocratic class. What set him apart are his leadership qualities and undaunting courage and love for his fellow workers. The author brings out a contrast between union leaders and the rulers. In capitalist economy, the policies of the ruler are usually anti-people. At the negotiating table, Lávúwo stands for the truth and in solidarity with the workers. The management tries to bribe him with material things but fails. The dialogues between Lávúwo and the negotiation team are loaded with proverbs.

Olúgbọ̀n: ọ̀kọ̀ọ̀kan là á yọ̀sẹ̀ lẹ̀kù.....

Lávúwo: Ẹni tó fí ọ̀dún mẹ̀wáá pilẹ̀ wẹ̀rẹ̀ ọ̀dún mẹ̀lòò ni yóò fí wa bugi je? Ani ká je ẹ̀kuru kó tán nínú àwo, ẹ̀ tún n gbọ̀wọ̀ rẹ̀ sínú àwo....

Arẹ̀sà: A kì í kanjú tu olú ọ̀rán. Ẹni à n gbéyàwó bọ̀ wáa bá se lẹ̀ máa naga wò ó lóri ogiri.

Lávúwo: ká fári apá kan, ka dá apá kan sí?

Arẹ̀sà: Lávúwo, bi iná bá jó ni jó ọ̀mọ ẹni, tara ẹni là á kókọ̀ gbọ̀n dànù.....

Olúgbọ̀n: Ẹni tó diwọ̀ rúgúdu tó ni ká gbà, bi nńkan ba wa nibẹ̀, ó fẹ́ẹ̀ fún ni ni. Ẹni tó rántí Táyé se lẹ̀ gbàgbé kẹ̀hindé (oi:53)

[Olúgbọ̀n: one by one, one takes his legs from the pit where the oil of palm-nuts is extracted.

Lávúwo: he who plans for ten years before his madness manifests, how many years will he take to show the real madness? We say we should exhaust the ẹ̀kuru beans in the plate, you are still gathering the remnant in the plate.....

Arẹ̀sà: Nobody is in haste to pluck the olú ọ̀rán (Mush room fungus). The one whose bride is being brought home cannot be spying on the wall.

Lávúwo: Must you satisfy one at the detriment of the other (Barb one side of the head and leave the other side)?

Arẹ̀sà: Lávúwo, if a fire is burning you and burning your son, it is only wise to quench your own fire first.

Olúgbọ̀n: he who closes his fist in preparation to give you a gift, if there is something there; he definitely desires to give you. The one that has done one thing for Táyé, would he forget kẹ̀hindé? (p.53)]

The aim of the dialogue is to resolve the workers' crisis. The chiefs devise a plan to blackmail Lávúwo by offering him money, house and other material things. He rejected the entire offer but unknown to him, he has been trapped. The chiefs have invited a photographer to take all the pictures of their actions. The pictures are used as exhibits to rope Lávúwo and defame his name. After the collapse of the negotiation, the chiefs utter a proverb of conspiracy against Lávúwo:

Arẹ̀sà: Ọ̀riṣà ta a kẹ̀ kẹ́ kẹ́, tí ò gbọ̀ kíkẹ́. Ọ̀riṣà tá a tẹ̀ tẹ̀ tí ó gbọ̀ títẹ̀. Ojú pópó ní gbé. Ẹni ilẹ̀lẹ̀, ae teni fun un. (oi:55)

The idol that is cared for but refused the caring, the idol that is decorated but refused it. It is thrown to the road side. A man of insignificance is not worthy of honour.(p.55)

The workers come together to fight for their rights. They embark on strike and series of arrest were made. Láuwo is arrested and detained. All the workers become united, their ranks swell and they contribute money to fight their employer in the law court. Láuwo and other leaders of the union stimulate the workers with encouraging messages. He assures them that they would succeed and they will overcome the oppressors if they are united:

Láuwo: òní àgbè tókò dé. Ó pa ọkọ mọ ọlẹ àgbè tókò dé, o pa ọkọ mọ ọjọ kan n bọ, dájúdájú, tí ọkọ yóò pa àgbè mọ. Ariwo a wa a ta. Ìkòkò n sesu ẹni kan ò gbọ, bódó bá n guńyán ariwo o maa ta o (oi:30)

[Láuwo: Today, the farmer comes from the farm and keeps the hoe. Tomorrow, the farmer comes from the farm, and keeps the hoe. One day is certainly coming, that the hoe will keep away the farmer. There will be a great cry. The pot is cooking yam, nobody hears it, but when the portal is pounding yam, there will be great noise (p. 30)].

The proverb of Lawuwo is both descriptive and explanatory. The workers are being oppressed on daily basis without relief. The leaders are crushing them with hunger and poor salary, they pound the workers like yam and nobody cares to help, one day will come when the workers will gain victory. All the workers collectively make a resolution of solidarity using rhetorical question-proverb: «kí leégún ẹ tí ò lè fàárò jó» (p.29) [What is the other business of eégún masquerade that he cannot use the morning to dance?(p.29)].

So the strike starts and the workers refuse to work normally as usual. Meanwhile, the council of Onímògún infiltrates the union and plants Idowu as a spy. A syndicate of gamblers arranged by the chiefs are set to strike at Láuwo's house. The discussion that ensues between Láuwo and his wife brings out one important message that Òkédìjì wants all union leaders to take note and that is, leaders should always listen to wise counsels from their family members during crisis. Moreńikẹ counsels her husband to be careful and follow the path of peace instead of rebellion because it is usually very difficult to overcome the capitalist leaders who control political power and the economy. She advised her husband to fight, retreat and fight before negotiation. She asks:

Şàmò şámọ ẹni tó n figi ọgèdẹ yáná ta ni kò mọ pé òtùtù ní yóò ran an sọrun. Ẹni tí wọn fẹ sun je tẹlẹ, ó wa n fepo para, o lẹ jókòó si ojúbuná, kẹ̀ù! (oi:38)

[Truly, one that is warming himself with plantain firewood would die of cold. The one which the enemy wants to roast for food now rubs himself with oil and sits at the side of fire, he will quickly burn!]

When Láuwo responds that the matter will be settled in the court of Onímògún. Moreńikẹ asks her husband questions loaded with proverbs:

Ta ni ẹ lérò pé esinsin yóò gbè bí kò ẹ elégbò? Ọtẹ àgbàdo tí ẹ lè kúrò nínú ọmọ àparò tí tí ayé? (oi:39)

[Whom do you think the fly will side except the sore owner? Can the rebellion against corn ever end in the heart of partridge offspring's for life? (p. 39)]

The proverbs here are indicative of the collapse of the judiciary and the wickedness of the rulers. Láuwo believes that all the workers will support him to the end. He believes in the judiciary. He stands on the truth and faithfully follows the truth but to the powers that-be, he is a trouble maker, who must be silenced. The counsel of Moreńikẹ and Wúraólá however is treated with levity and the repercussion is great. Few days later, the gamblers trick Moreńikẹ and dupe her of the money contributed by the workers. In order to evade disgrace, she commits suicide. When Láuwo comes back from a meeting, and finds his wife dead, the pain of Moreńikẹ's

death is too much for him he becomes insane immediately. The insanity of Lávúwo makes him utter anti-proverbs. He restructures, transforms and manipulates Yorùbá traditional proverbs to the point of humour. The fixed proverbs are twisted, combined and transformed to become what critics call «owe Lávúwo» «Lávúwo's anti-proverbs».

#### 4. LÁWÚWO'S ANTI-PROVERBS IN *RÉRÉ RÚN*

The transformation of a stereotyped word sequence with the purpose of a humoristic effect is called Anti-proverbs. To have full effect, anti-proverbs must be based on a known proverb. Okediji modifies some well known proverbs. Yorùbá proverb usually has two parts. Okediji leaves one part intact and transforms the other. The transformation of the second half may have no change in the meaning or the effect, and at times it may bring total change to the sentence structure and meaning. For example, before Lávúwo becomes mad, anti-proverb used has no effect on the meaning and structure of the proverb:

Bí ọmọde ba jágbón kíkú lẹ̀ẹ̀rùn, baba rẹ nàá a sì jágbón sisin in *sí ipàdo*  
 [If a child has devised the strategy to die during dry season the father will equally devise a strategy to bury him *near the stream*].

The phrase «*sí ipàdo*» is the transformed from «*nígbà òjò*». The actual proverb is «*Bọmọde bá jágbón kíkú lẹ̀ẹ̀rùn, baba rẹ àá a sì jágbón sisin in nígbà òjò*».

Here the transformation does not affect the meaning of proverb. However, transformation of proverb becomes anti-proverb when it follows these formal criteria:

1. Association: The similarity to the original sequence is strong enough to identify it, but there is no further connection. e.g
  - *Màlúù ti ò nírù pò ni Zango (anti-proverb)*  
*Màlúù ti ò nírù, ọlọrun ní lé eṣinṣin fún un.*  
 [The tailless cows are many in Zango  
 The tailless cows are sustained by God].
  - *Eni tó jìn sí kòtò, ojú rẹ ló fọ.*  
*Eni tó jìn sí kòtò, ó kọ ara iyókù lẹgbón.*  
 [He who falls into the pit is blind.  
 He who falls into the pit is a lesson to others].
2. Change of homonyms: A word which has several meaning is interpreted in a way.
  - *Ṣe ẹni tí kò bá kú yóò kuku jẹ ẹran tó ju erin lọ (oi:13)*  
 [He who is alive will eat meat greater than an elephant]  
*Instead of:*  
*Ṣe ẹni tí kò bá kú yóò kuku jẹ ẹran tó tó erin*  
*Instead of:*  
 [He who is alive will eat meat up to an elephant]
  - *Ilé ọba tó jó, panápanà ni ò tètè débè*  
*Ilé ọba tó jó ẹwà ló bu sí í*  
 [The king's palace gutted by fire is as a result of the lateness of the fire fighters  
 The king's palace gutted by fire, creates an avenue for additional aesthetic beauty].
3. Combination: Two sequences are combined
4. Occasional Allusions: a special connection can be seen not by language but by the situation.
5. Permutation: While keeping the syntactic structure, the words are jumbled.
6. Abridgement: The sequence is cut and thus changed completely-All's well that ends well.  
 E.g Pirilolongo Ji



7. Substitution: Parts of the sequence are replaced.
  - *Àìtètè mólè, olè ñ sálọ.*  
*Àìtètè mólè, olè ñ mú olóko.*  
[Lateness to catch the thief, makes the thief to run away.  
Lateness to catch the thief, makes the thief to catch the owner (farmer)].
8. Supplementation: A sentence with a contesting meaning is added to the original sequence
9. Syntactic change: the semantic structure of the sentence changes while the sequence of words stays the same.

Most of the organisation of transformations according to formal criteria may not all be present in the anti-proverbs of Láwúwo, but definitely the anti-proverbs in *Réré Rún* are not only humoristic, they have deep meaning when examined within the Marxist perspective.

Examples of Anti-proverbs

- *Şe iwò tà á ñ wàparò, aşọ re ñ pọ koko şùgbón àlùkò kò paşọ èsí dà (oi:92)*  
[Our watchful eyes on the partridge, its cloth (feather) is wretchedly red, but the woodcock (àlùkò) has not changed his garment since last year]

Láwúwo combines three different proverbs without completing each of the proverbs. The fixed proverbs are:

1. *Şe iwò tá à ñ wàparò bíi ká fidálá orí eyẹ ni kò pẹyẹ*  
[Our watchful eyes on the partridge is to kill and make it soup of okro but the destiny of the bird does not allow it]
2. *Ojú pón koko má fọ ó, ọrò finidùgbẹ finimù.*  
[The reddish eyes may not become blind; troubles may shake one but not destroy the person]
3. *Àwàyè kò paşọ èsí dà [Àwàyè insect does not change its last year's garment]*

The transformation of these proverbs brings humour to the hearers and readers, yet they have meanings. The proverbs of Láwúwo depict the sorrowful conditions and extreme poverty of the workers. The intention of the hunters is to kill the partridge and uses it for okro soup. The hunters in this context are the employers of labour while the workers are the partridges. The partridge never changes its God-given feathers, even though it works throughout its life span. The workers are like the partridge, the starvation salary they receive makes it difficult for them to live a normal life. They cannot change their clothes and other facilities that bring comfort. The employer of labour regards the workers as extension of machines. Láwúwo continues with his anti-proverbs.

1. Pirilolongo ó jí,  
Òjò ló keyele pọ mágbádó (oi:92)  
(The 'olongo' bird wakes up early.  
It is the rain that makes pigeon and maize reside together).

The original proverbs are:

- Pirilolongo ó jí, a kì í bókùnrun eyẹ lórí itẹ
- Òjò ló kó eyẹle pọ mádiyẹ.
- [The orange waxbill is always sprightly; one never finds an invalid in a nest.
- It is the rain that makes the pigeon resides with hens].

In the second proverb, the second part is cut off, remaining the first one. The 'olongo' bird is never at rest, always on the move. It works without time of rest. The 'olongo' bird refers to the workers. The second anti-proverb is 'òjò ló kó ẹyẹlé pọ mágbàdọ' [It is the rain that makes pigeon and maize to reside together]. The maize or corns are the food of the pigeons. The pigeon are the employers who feed on the blood of the workers. The pigeon is always neat, well-fed and happy as domestic bird unlike other domestic animals. The pigeon never works.

The onímògún council is symbolic of the comprador bourgeoisie in Nigeria. They are detached from the peasantry but use the poor as labourers. They are consumers of foreign values; they are like pigeons who consume corns. According to Geoffrey (1985: 67): «The essential characteristics of this class is that it does not own or control capitalist means of production but acts as a commercial and sub managerial intermediary between the foreign bourgeoisie and the local population of workers peasants and remnant farmers».

The worker (Láwúwo) in this case belongs to a class which does not possess the crucial forces directing the life and development of his society. They are mere «corns» in the mouth of the ruling class.

2. Ẹ bi eégún ẹni bá jóo re, *ka wí*  
[If one's masquerade dances well, we should commend him]  
Instead of:  
Sebi eégún ẹni bá joore, *orí a máa yani*  
[If one's eégún masquerade dances well, one's head is elated].

Here «orí a máa yani» one's head is elated, is transformed to *ka wí*- we should commend him or say so.

The message of Láwúwo is that the «eégún masquerade» of the workers cannot dance well, so there is no reason for joy. The workers have been disorganised and infiltrated, the spirit of one accord among them is broken. The 'eégún masquerade' which symbolizes the workers are in despondent mood.

3. Ẹni tí a bá fí orí rẹ fọ àgbọn ọ̀tálénírínwòèrigì nì yòò forí mule láiyọ (oi:95)  
[He whose head is used to crush the coconut, four hundred and fifty molars are deeply rooted and cannot be removed]

Two different proverbs are combined together in this proverb. The original proverb is:

1. Ẹni tí a bá fí orí rẹ fọ àgbọn, *kì í dúró jẹ nìbẹ̀.*

Láwúwo is the head of the workers, and his head has been used by the employers to crush the coconut. He is insane now, whatever comes out of the strike, he cannot partake in it. The transformation of the proverb may elicit humour but the fact is that Láwúwo is insane and he can no longer benefit. In Nigeria, many union leaders have been used as scape goats; employers of labour have used their heads to crush the coconut like Láwúwo.

Other anti-proverbs in *Rẹrẹ Rún* such as:

4. Òkú n sùnkún òkú, akásólérí kò mọ ibi òun n rẹ (oi:95)
5. Ọmọ tí yòò jẹ, Àṣàmú, okeere la tí wò ó.
6. Àgbàlagbà kì í rí erin tan, kó máa jó lán gbá lán gbá.

The original proverbs are:

- Òkú n sùnkún òkù, akásòlérí n sùnkun ara wọ̀n.
- Omo ti yóò jẹ Àṣàmú kékéré ló ti n ẹnu ẹ́múṣámú.
- Àgbàlagbà kì í rí erin tán, kó di amurin.
- [The dead is mourning the dead, mourners are mourning themselves]
- [A child that will be great in the future will show the manifestation early in life]
- [When an elderly sees an elephant, it does not afterward becomes a lizard]

The anti-proverbs depict the helplessness and hopelessness of the workers in a capitalist economy. They live a life of misery. They are alienated. They produce the materials but they are not given the luxury of tasting the benefit. The employers are like elephant 'erin' too mighty to change their ways of life. They regard the workers as lizards. When other workers assembly in sympathy with Láwúwo, he releases the final anti-proverbs:

*Eni tó bá forí tì í dọ́pin, àfàimọ̀ nì kò fí nì dí aláààrù*  
[Whosoever perseveres to the end will become a load carrier]

The original proverb, «eni tó bá foriti dopin, ni a o gbàlà», is transformed but the message is sharp. This is a call for more action. Silence in the face of oppression will lead to slavery. Láwúwo seems to be a revolutionary realist. He confronts the present with action and has no interest in the tradition of compromise with the leaders who have no interest of the workers. He advocates rural based revolution that will dismantle the imperialist agents who are in the helm of affairs in Nigeria.

From this brief analyses of the proverbs and anti-proverbs in *Réré Rún*, one can now answer the seven questions raised under our theoretical framework.

#### 1. Who does the play benefits?

*Réré Rún* is a play meant to stimulate the masses, the workers and the exploited to rise up and fight for themselves. Adeniyi, one of the actors, says:

*Alubàtá kì í darin, o tó gé é! (oi:3)*  
*Bàtá drummer cannot take up song at the same time, it is enough!(p.3)*

The message of the proverbs and anti-proverbs in the text is also for the employers of labour. Láwúwo warns the employer of labour through the following proverbs:

Tàkúté ló mú ààlò sinu oko yìí, 'ààlò' n sùnkún, olóko n yọ, ó n rẹ̀rìn ín. Olóko ò mò pé bí ààlò tí n lọ ara rẹ̀ ló n lọ olóko! Nítorí pé ààlò ò gbọ̀dò kú sínú oko rẹ̀ kò lè rù ú là; kò sí bo ẹ̀ lè gbé ọ̀dún nàà já kó tó jáde láyé (oi:25)

[Ààlò is entrapped in the farm, ààlò is weeping, the farmer is happy, he is laughing. The farmer does not know that as the ààlò is crushing itself, he is crushing the farmer! Because ààlò must not die in the farmer's farm, it is a taboo. Any farmer whose farm is the site of ààlò's death will die, he cannot survive that year (p. 25)]

The message is that both the farmer and the ààlò are to be careful. The employers of labour can never have rest or peace of mind once the labourers/workers are treated like mere objects to be disposed at any time. Okediji belongs to the middle class but he teams up with the workers and the lower class to stimulate their consciousness to rise up and fight for their rights.

## CONCLUSION

Okediji writes the play, *Réré Rún* with the intention to ignite the consciousness of the workers, to mobilize their determination and inspire them to future victories. The proverbs and anti-proverbs used in the play are simple, concrete and applicable to the day-to-day struggle of the Nigerian workers. The value the playwright reinforces is liberation from economic oppression. He subverts the value of exploitation and ruthless extermination of union leaders. In capitalist society like Nigeria, a small group are the oppressors and exploiters. They are the owners of everything: the land, the houses, factories, banks and people's labour. The writer uses *Réré Rún* to set free the creative energy of the workers so as to explode. Okediji clearly delineates the actors, the workers versus the employers of labour, the upper class versus the lower class. The proverbs and anti-proverbs portray the types of conflict (which is purely economic conflict, conflict of survival among the workers) apparent in most developing countries like Nigeria. The messages of Okediji's proverbs and anti-proverbs are for the wise. Such proverbs may be full of humoristic statements, yet they are coded-languages with deep-rooted meanings.

## REFERENCES

- ADEYEMI, O. (2010): Magical realism in contemporary Yorùbá novels in Charles Bodunde (ed.) *Texts and Theories in Tradition: Black African literature and emerging traditions pp.91-104*. Germany: Bayreuth African Studies, University of Bayreuth.
- BAMIGBOSE, A. (1974): *The Novels of D.O.Fagunwa*. Benin: Ethope publishing co-operation
- Bamigbose, A. (2007). *The Novels of D.O.Faunwa: A commentary*. Ibadan: Nelson Publisher
- BARBER, K. (1995): African language literature and post-colonial criticism, *Research in African Literature*, 26(4), pp.3-30.
- EAGLETON, T. (1996): *Literary theory: An Introduction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press.
- FAGUNWA, D.O. (1938): *Ògbójú oḍe Nínú Igbó Irunmọlẹ*, London: Nelson.
- FAGUNWA, D.O. (1949): *Igbó Olódùmarè*. Lagos: Nelson.
- FAGUNWA, D.O. (1954): *Irinkerindo Nínú Igbó elégbèje*. London: Nelson.
- GEOFFREY, H. (1985): Two African Aesthetics: Soyinka vs. Cabral, in George M. Guleberger (ed) *Marxism and African Literature* pp.64-93. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa world Press.
- HASLETT, M. (1999): Marxist Literary theories, in Wolfrerys (ed.). *Literary theories: A reader and guide*. 99-108, New York: New York University Press.
- IŞQLA, A. (1978): The writers' Art in the modern Yorùbá novel. Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Ibadan: University of Ibadan.
- IŞQLA, A. (2010): *Making culture memorable: essays on language, culture and development*. Ibadan: Hope Publications.
- OGUNSINA, B. (2006): *Sociology of the Yorùbá novels: An Introduction*. Ilorin: Integrity Publication.
- OKEDIJI, O. (1969): *Àjà ló lẹrù*. Ibadan: Longman
- OKEDIJI, O. (1971): *Àgbàlagbà Akàn*. Lagos: Longman
- OKEDIJI, O. (1973): *Réré Rún*. Ibadan: Onibonoje (Nig.) Ltd
- OKEDIJI, O. (1987): *Bínú tí rí*. Ibadan: Onibonoje Publishers.
- Okediji, O. (1987). *Sango*. Ibadan: Onibonoje (Nig.) Ltd.
- Okediji, O. (1991). *Atótó arére*. Ibadan: UPL.
- Okediji, O. (1997). *Aájò Ajé*. Lagos: Agbemen Nig. Co. Ltd.
- Soyinka, W. (2010). *In the Forest of Olódùmarè. A Translation of D.O.Fagunwa's Igbó Olódùmarè*. Ibadan: Evans Brothers (Nigeria Publishers) Limited.