

GENDER IDEOLOGIES AS A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING GENDER-BASED OPPRESSION IN NIGERIAN FICTION

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Abstract

This research focuses on the narrative incidents of gender ideologies that have informed different social constructions, hierarchies, treatment, value systems, and responses in the selected novels of two female Nigerian novelists of Igbo descent. The patriarchal and feminist ideologies are two separate concerns inextricably linked to the selected authors and their novels. The patriarchal “deity” ego of superiority visible in Igbo customs is discernible in the narrative patterns of the novelists. Inherent in this dilemma is the feminist opposition that puts a strain on customs that promote actions of gender-based oppression visible in the forms of forced marriage, sexism, discrimination, inequality, sexual exploitation, verbal/emotional abuse and spousal battery. The premises of this paper centres on feminist concepts and the dualistic ideologies that capture the portraiture of denigrating female experiences and the degree of psychological effects discernible in the writers’ projection of the female psyche. Buchi Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* (1976) has displayed a feminist mentality that hinged on radical paradigm, while Gloria Ogo’s *While Men Slept* (2017) has adopted a womanist stance in negotiating between duty and self-fulfilment under subjugation with severe emotional/psychological stress. Despite the two different ideological feminist tools employed in representing the realities of the African women in the novels, there are still evidences of neurotic manifestation due to the overwhelming stress of gender-based oppression acts. One implication is that the Afro-Feminist view of gender complementarity and accommodation has led to oppressive emotional repression. This contradicts the male writers’ processes of describing female pain in a phase that demands self-discovery and inward freedom.

Keywords: Gender-Based oppression, Patriarchal Ideology, Feminist Ideology, Repression, Psychological Stress (Neurosis)

Introduction

In the context of Nigerian fiction with a special reference to novelists of Igbo descent, two ideologies surface: first is the patriarchal ideology, the writing culture which configures gender based on stereotypes. In this case it becomes clear that we cannot speak of patriarchal ideology without reference to the patriarchal culture which is often constructed on the ideology of traditional Igbo culture. Viewed from the feminist lens, patriarchy is a structured system of power that categorizes a given cultural milieu into groups on the notions of superiority and inferiority based on sex (Echols 1989: 416). This tradition creates a “binary construction of masculinity and femininity with dominant images of gender dichotomies” (Njoku 2017: 153). Millet (1969:46) suggests that an important dominant tendency that characterizes patriarchy is male-centeredness—an attitude that projects males as custodians of norms, the only subject to be obeyed by the “others”—females. Connell (2005: 77) argues that this form of hegemonic masculinity is constructed on a traditional system that embodies legitimacy of a patriarch—a patterned domination of men and subordination of women. The above idea of course is based on customs and habits that define masculinity and femininity from the myriads of points of view. On the whole however, we find that the attitude of some writers (particularly males) to

masculinity is more widespread than to femininity. The earliest works of Igbo-Nigerian writers have projected a strict depiction of rich culture and worldview of the Igbo. Novels in this category include those of Chinua Achebe (*Things Fall Apart* 1958), Onuora Nzekwu (*Wand of Noble Wood* 1961), Cyprain Ekwensi (*Jagua Nana* 1961) John Munonye (*The Only Son* 1966) and Elechi Amadi (*The Great Pond* 1969). In these narratives, we find various attitudes that bring to mind the distinction that places women and girls far below men and boys. Their views of masculinity are, not surprisingly, conditioned by female predicament but by conscious artistic presentations that project the female as a figure laced with inferiority and vulnerability. In most literary texts of Igbo origin, the politics of superiority revolves around males as the generative force for female existence and dependence. This is spurred by a cultural psyche that “facilitates the continuity of the lineage through marriage with a premium placed on birthing males” (Okereke, 2018: 119). Having consistently established this cultural ideology in literary texts, the premium placed on the male child “assumes a destructive aura” (Okereke, 2018: 121) as the intextualization of femalehood brings unfulfilment and agony.

Notably, the attitude of the above-mentioned Igbo intellectuals and literary artists in particular is hinged on the patriarchal mentality that confines the female on restricted domestic physical and psychological spaces—the bedroom, the compound, the fireplace, the farmland, the water banks, the depressed mind and controlled/manipulated psyche etc. Any action or expressiveness outside these marked spaces is grossly questioned with mapped out cultural retribution. This issue is replete in the historical background which informs the narratives that privilege the male over female. If their central distinguishing patriarchal ideology is taken primarily, the communal ethos of male aggression and superiority become concrete pointers to cultural hierarchies of traditional Igbo society visible in literary texts. As such passiveness, docility and inferiority become peculiar character category represented with an inaudible disembodied voice of the female who has been oppressed for too long. The voice is never heard; never obeyed. Most importantly, a river of thought has been formed whose security of continuous existence was bound by continuous existence of binary oppositions that categorize the male as superior and the female as inferior. This erroneous idea marks off the female as naturally passive, while the male is uniquely active. The widespread contentions valid in some aspects are no doubt replete with consequences to trap and procure a victim. Hence, the pain of one female, results in the pain of others.

Secondly, the issue of patriarchal culture which configures gender on stereotypes informs the feminist ideology. This is a corrective ideology that exists from the quest for female emancipation movements and feminism. This ideology apparently exposes the need for female consciousness and sensitivity in reality through artistic representation of cultural stereotypes that impinge on female rights and general well-being. Chioma Opara (1990:158) suggests that this “inveterate marginalization of the African woman by her patriarchal culture is flayed in African literary works written from the feminist perspectives”.

On the whole, the feminist ideology serves the purpose of re-educating the female in regaining self-worth and confidence despite disruptive patriarchal agenda. In other words, the female docility, passiveness, weakness and inferiority that have been projected through patriarchal notions of gender are constructively challenged in the male-writers’ artistic representation of human life. It should be understood that the feminist conditioning referred to earlier is a consequence of the tyranny which the male writers have exercised for decades on a section of the world. Thus the attempt by some female writers to wage war on identifiable negative cultural practices against the female central in the narratives of male-authored novels has

necessitated a strong reaction for female liberation. One must admit, on the part of women and girls, a welcome shrewd questioning borne out of a quest for freedom and right treatment. Equipped with vision, they have seen instances of female oppression that have weakened their resolution and heightened their inferiority. This new discovery has led to a reproduction of knowledge interrogating academic scholarship in areas of literary knowledge that promote patriarchal oppression and intellectual silencing of the female gender. This apparently is a way of completing the human story half-narrated by the male gender. The twentieth century female Nigerian-Igbo writers have focused on the idea of deconstructing patriarchal consciousness, and a fair valuation of the uniqueness of individuals in Igbo cultural milieu regardless of their biological sex. From a general perspective, in Nigerian literature, female writings have been adopted as educative and assertive tools for feminist principles. Flora Nwapa (*Efuru* 1966), Buchi Emecheta (*The Slave Girl* 1977) and Akachi Ezeigbo (*The Last of the Strong Ones* 1996) etc are evidences of these educative and assertive tools. So the basis of their fictional works stems from the need to debunk the erroneous consciousness and stereotypes that have repressively confined women and girls in the home, marriage, relationship, education, political activities and the society in general. Notably, a specimen from a female writer's fictional art may illustrate a reactionary tendency in fighting patriarchal oppression which may be too extreme and against cultural tradition. They may also exhibit the womanist perspectives in handling female experiences.

Theoretical Anchor

From the perspective of this research which hinges on different aspects of gender-based oppression against the female, the study employs feminist concepts against marked affinities in psychoanalytical concepts to explicate evidences of oppressive behaviour against the female gender leading to neurotic manifestation in female authored novels which is obviously absent in male-authored novels. From psychoanalytical perspective, Freud's ideology exposes the binary categorization dominating the literary world with male-dominated mindset—a patterned psychological development of two variant forms called Oedipus and Electra complexes. Freud suggests that both “sexes encounter and must deal with the issues of castration, which results from boys developing sexual attraction toward their mothers, and girls developing sexual attraction towards their fathers” (Eagleton 2008: 133). Freud's idea on castration is hinged on separation that represses feelings—a consciousness that divides sexual energies built on idealized ego of the unconscious and volitionally shaped by social factors inherent within a cultural milieu. A close interpretation of Freud's ideology is reinforced by psychological dependence of certain cultural milieux that acknowledge distinctive patterns of manhood and womanhood.

Freud's idea on psychoanalysis further captures the three models of the human mind—conscious, subconscious and unconscious as the propellers for the construction of behaviour and identity in relation to a social structure. The above models affect the human psyche and are very important in interpreting experiences. Barry (1995:191) suggests that “the psyche consists of the ego, the superego, and the id. The ego is the unconscious human desires which are sexual in nature and are often put in check by the conscious(superego)—the alter ego which is controlled by the moral values of a society. The “id” embodies the primitive and biological instincts which manifests based on the pleasure principle—a unique unconscious level that focuses on the instinctual drives and desires (Freud 1949: 14). The *eros* (life instinct) and *thanatos* (death instincts) are two important concepts of the “id” necessary for human survival. The *eros* propels the instinct to survive in life threatening activities, while the *thanatos* spurs violent or destructive behaviour in an individual in oppressive situations (Freud 1949: 18). The

censoring of these desires causes repression which is temporarily hidden in the unconscious (Barry1995:191). This repression is not the permanent removal of desires but an obstruction perceived as “unremembered or ignored crisis, un-admitted desires or traumatic memories forced out of consciousness or awareness and absorbed into the unconscious” (Eagleton 2008: 97).

In Judith Kegan Gardiner’s view, “psychoanalysis is useful for feminists because it purports to tell us what gender means—that is, how persons become psychologically feminine or masculine” (1985: 113). Feminist application of Freud’s concepts helps to explore the models used by female literary artists in interpreting female personalities and experiences. Significantly, Freud’s analogy on the “mind” is understood as the reflection of the human mind as well as the connections that expose relationships between individuals and literary texts within a cultural context. In feminist criticism, the “mind” within patriarchal cultures evokes a feeling that the male is superior, while the female whose authority is denied, is immaterial (Gardiner 1985:114). Basically, psychoanalysis helps to interpret the experiences of female characters and the emotions that spurred their assertiveness. Specifically, “repression” as one of the defence mechanisms is adopted by the female characters to cope with the stress of the conflict or traumatic oppressive experiences caused by gender perception and roles. The female ego through repression pushes disturbing ideas, thoughts and feelings out of consciousness. Since too much is demanded of the female characters within their cultural context, they are “likely to fall sick. This unique sickness is perceived as neurosis” (Eagleton 2008:131-132). This neurosis is often referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which may result to numbing, hallucination, nightmares, flashbacks and death due to overwhelming events (Caruth 1995: 4).

The feminist perspectives of this study are discussed under “radical” and “womanist” stances (Kolawole 1997: 26). A feminist critic into the selected women writer’s mind captures the psychology of oppression inherent in their texts which is fueled by struggle for liberation. Also, the relationship between the mind and the text are visibly unified in the texts of the selected female writers through the womanist tenet of negotiation based on accommodationist stance (Nnaemeka 2003:357). This is achieved by interpreting unique gender dimensions visible in the selected literary texts under study.

Gender-Based Oppression and the Unhappy Females in Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* and *Ogo’s While Men Slept*

The recreation of Igbo cultural milieu in fictional works has been a step-by-step celebration of male heroism and superiority. This pattern is expounded through male narratives of Igbo ancestry, a vigorous expressiveness that restricted positive discourses on female identity. Notably, the issues of undying male superiority, discrimination, gender inequality, verbal abuse, forced marriage and sexual exploitation have culminated in a long-standing unhappiness for females in Nigerian fiction. This assertion has thus questioned the traps of gender-based-oppression alongside the legitimacy of patriarchal ideology through debates in academic publications. The implication here is that, the trend in the novels of male writers of Igbo descent has indicated a plethora of negative psychic energy—a condition of bondage hostile to female existence. As such, one discovers a touch of unhappiness, despair and hopeless replete with series of female agonies in Nigerian fiction.

Unhappiness for females in Nigerian fiction reflects in the title of Buchi Emecheta’s novel *The Bride Price*. The point Emecheta makes through the choice of her title is an ideological feminist

analogy drawn between the Ibuza Igbo cultural values and her protagonist's predicament. To the Igbo people goes the credit of naming culture and linguistic aspect of social reality. To be specific, pursuit of ultimate logic about "name is important and an ultimate value to the Igbo as the birth of a child. This is rounded out with parental expectation and life experiences" (Onumajuru, 308). The name of the protagonist, Aku-nna as a female name is a lexicalized sentence written in one word which means—"father's wealth" (Emecheta 1976:10). Feminists will regrettably see Akunna as a girl who is valued by her father, Ezekiel Odia as a mere treasure through 'bride price'. From a feminist perspective, the above name creates 'gender identity differences in Igbo cultural milieu leading to social factors such as class structure, low self-esteem or status consciousness. One garb which name wears in the Igbo community is a sensitive one. A close interpretation of a male lexical name "Nna-ndo" (father's shelter), the name of Akunna's only brother is a rediscovery of status consciousness that has been institutionalized in Igbo Ibuza community.

To Emecheta, there is a primitive symbolic cultural system that every Ibuza Igbo girl must follow—the system of early marriage. This system embodies contradictions of a binary nature—the wishful thoughts of freedom and obedience to tribal patterns. Akunna, the young female protagonist is aware of this known cultural tradition which conflicts with the desire to further her education after her father's death. She knows that "she has to marry early"—a wealth creative purpose which allows her bride price to be used in settling her brother's school fees (Emecheta 1976:52). Between the dreams of furthering her education and its realization falls the shadows of uncertainty—a disillusionary phenomenon that reveals her as a frail and mere girl-being of less cultural importance. Indeed, Akunna is too "insignificant to be regarded as a blessing" in her family (Emecheta 1976: 9). Auntie Matilda's statement—"nobody is going to take care of you until you marry" offers no succor to her female dignity (Emecheta 1976:38). The above ideological stance is culturally patriarchal and stereotypically oppressive. Auntie Matilda's confession echoes the collective stance of other females—an emotionally oppressive route with "mental pain" (Mohammed 2010: 465). To other women, Akunna's plight is not a renegotiable one, so she cannot wriggle herself out of the questionable early marriage custom without explosive consequences. Notably, "bride price" in Emecheta's metaphoric use has restrictive influence on its user's choice of usage. It confers silence on female victims and expects fertility in childbearing stupendously hinged on male-child syndrome. No wonder, Akunna's father, Ezekiel Odia erroneously attributes his lack of many sons after "paying heavy bride price" in marrying his wife, Ma Blackie to her bad luck (Emecheta 1976:9).

Gloria Ogo's title "While Men Slept" also captures a thought-provoking distorted image of men's silence in the midst of oppressive psychological traditional buffeting against the female gender which appears very glaring. The title of Ogo's first novel offers a statement that requires leaping into the future for possible answer; it comments that while men slept something ominous is bound to happen. One is compelled to ask—will men ever keep watch? Ogo's choice of the title is analogous to Christian-religious ideological guide to morality "that while men slept, the enemy came and sowed tares". The word "men" in the title is also a generic term for humanity. Characteristically, people have passionately internalized silence—a form of psychic order and disorder in supporting female's angst. The Freudian patriarchal principle of repressive attitude of female inferiority and powerlessness is the destructive energy that suffocated Uloma, the young protagonist till her death. In Ogo's presentation, Uloma is a repressed young woman emotionally and physically battered by a husband whose cultural sensibility left silently clubbing his pregnant wife to death—a craving for boys after the birth of three girls. All in all, the attitude of Ikemba, Uloma's husband is not impracticable for real

life situations “three daughters birthed so far, a fourth on the way and not even one male” (Ogo 2017:17). We observe the social prestige attached to male children—a pathetic “institutionalization of sexual differences” (Okin 1989: 2) as perceived in roles and power relations.

On a strong note, male-child syndrome is a catalyst for female unhappiness. No doubt, this often causes gender inequality that prescribes attitudes or behaviour on different genders. For example, the Ibuza Igbo cultural community in Emecheta’s *The Bride Price* creates social construction that values male children more than the female ones. This is clearly sketched during the burial ceremony of Ezekiel Odia, the father of Akunna and Nna-nndo. Akunna as the elder sister and a girl-child is expected to exhibit more mournful emotions by wailing loudly more than his younger brother, Nna-nndo who has been discouraged from crying—a manly disposition for superiority. The irony that deepens this discriminative attitude is hinged on the cultural attitude that “girls and women are meant to exhibit emotion” (Emecheta 1976:30). Male child syndrome exposes a realization that gives females a sense of powerlessness that is equated to barrenness—physically and emotionally. One observes that Gloria Ogo’s fictional Igbo village of Okuwohia gives prominence to male child syndrome. The forced lunatic aggression Ikemba frequently exhibits towards Uloma is as a result of his coercive respect for the male gender and his disappointment for lacking one in his immediate family. Uloma confesses:

Whatever cordiality that existed between us crumbled with the birth of Nchezor. Ikemba had hoped she would be born a boy. He even bought a small hoe to match the one he uses at the farm, but he forgot it is the gods who give children. (Ogo 2017: 47)

The half-digested thoughts of the narrator expose the fact that Ikemba “had lain awake, envisaging the strong sons Uloma would bear him. His mind’s eyes had captured the hot sun scorching their small, naked, brown backs as they marched beside him to the farm, machetes swinging” (Ogo 2017:51). Ikemba’s unkind attitude, of course, is the charge of dependency on males for the sustenance of lineage name in Igbo worldview (Okereke & Egbung 2014: 2059). It seems certain, then, that his lack of sons is the cause of lack of affection for Uloma. We cannot ignore Ikemba’s statement in recognizing the above fact: “If one day, I succumb in a manner that is irreversible, is it these girls that will mend my leaking roofs during the rains?” (Ogo 2017:51) This provides a robust foil into the Igbo custom’s craving for the birth of more male children—a stable solidity of happiness and unity (Worugji 2014:137). The implication is that the birth of more girls disintegrates a family and stifles the existence of happiness on the part of the woman. Obviously, the crime Uloma has committed as a young wife is summarized in Ikemba’s statement: “let her stop pushing out female children to shame my manhood” (Ogo 2017: 51).

For Emecheta, gender inequality thrives on the basis of male child syndrome. It inculcates pessimism and incubates a feeling of suppression and inferiority on the female being. Iloba’s derogatory statement “I will never do such a foolish thing as to pay for Akunna’s schooling” (Emecheta 1976:74) is reductively derogatory. Nna-nndo’s education is deemed important because he is culturally and naturally superior, while Akunna takes the inferior position as a female. From psychoanalytical perspective, Akunna has been castrated from her desire to be educated—a dilemmalike situation that proves her dependency on men (father and future husband) for survival. As a result, marriage becomes the path to Akunna’s painful maturity—a path strewn with thorns of emotional pains.

Another reason for female unhappiness is female abuse or rape. This is evidently linked to male superiority—a sort of close-up for male ego. A reflection on the Ibuza initiation tradition into womanhood at the onset of menstruation draws attention to sexual exploitation. The indictment by the omniscient narrator does not hide the truism of female abuse—“...custom allowed this. Boys could squeeze a girl’s breasts until they hurt. The girl is conditioned to control her temperament by not showing aggressive emotion against the boy...” (Emecheta 1976: 97). As just mentioned, Akunna is a victim of this custom. Her male admirer (suitor), Okoboshi “seized her roughly at the shoulder; grabbed her breasts and started to squeeze and hurt her” (Emecheta 1976:120). Situational irony abounds in Ma Blackie’s response to her daughter’s complaint against her abuser: “you mean you have nice breasts and don’t want men to touch?” (Emecheta 1976:121) Her mother’s response is a dubious expression hinged on traditional patriarchal ego that represses female revolt, female succor and freedom in situations threatening emotional and psychological stability.

Next, tensions are buttressed by certain occurrences leading to forced marriage which encourages sexual bout, an act of abuse against the female gender. Akunna is jerked back to reality when kidnapped by her abductors as a bride to the man she despises. The violence of her nightmare finds her terrified in her waking world: “what was a girl to do in a predicament of this nature? There was no need struggling....a common native girl kidnapped into being a bride. The realization was so painful....Nature has a way of defending her own: when the pain becomes too much to bear, you lose consciousness” (Emecheta 1976:126). There seems to be a culturally accepted violent rhythm of forced marriage in Igbo Ibuza community called “Isi nmo”—a cut of a girl’s curl of hair by a man with or without her consent endears her to him for life. The man in question could force the girl into sleeping with him. However, any form of splitting refusal requires the assistance of his friend in holding her down until she is disvirgined (Emecheta 1976:132). In all the foregoing, the “men would not be blamed at all because it was their custom” (Emecheta 1976:135). Indeed Akunna becomes a prisoner of forced marriage. The above oppressive condition propels her rebellious, assertive and separatist tendencies strongly linked to feminist ideology.

Eventually, from the trauma of abduction to physical battery in the hands of her abductor, the narrator, who is a feminist, learns about the serious psychological effect of rape and forced marriage, because the male abductor (Okoboshi) “slapped her very hard....The slap had been painful and she was bleeding inside her mouth. Tears of desolation flowed from her eyes as he knelt over her, untying his wrapper with shaky hands....He was too bitter” (Emecheta 1978:138). In a perceptive manner, the feminist antics of assertiveness and radicalism against patriarchal oppression become an enormous talent—a fighting tool imbued with oratorical strategy of attack. Akunna’s adherence to this feminist tenet is very potent in hurting her abductor’s ego. So she uses the ironic mode of expression—“Okoboshi the son of Obidi! You say your father is a chief—dog chief, that is what he is, if the best he can manage to steal for his son is a girl who has been taught what men taste like by a slave” (Emecheta 1976:138). Akunna’s attempt is one with a thousand and one effect; her consciously expressed lie of her defilement by a common slave, Chike Ofulue achieves a revolutionary effect that subdues the emotion of Okoboshi—the type that hurts a man’s ego of victory. So one realizes the powerlessness and the self-defeating realization incubated in Okoboshi’s outburst—“Get out of my bed, you public bitch!” (Emecheta1976:139). *Eros*—the life and death instinct in psychoanalytical perspective, is the activator of Akunna’s inherent quest for emancipation and survival. No doubt, Akunna’s revolutionary aggressiveness is spurred by her *Superego*—the

wild or uncontrolled “insubordinate unconscious” (Eagleton 2008:136) that supports feminist rebellious tendencies. This feminist commitment to survival throws all decorum to the wind to achieve physical and emotional independence. The aggressive paradigm pointed out earlier is fully realized: rebellion and separation from patriarchal figureheads and cultural mores. This feminist aggression is visible in her act of elopement with a lover boy—a slave (Chike Ofulue) restricted by cultural morality and responsibility. Emecheta renders many consequences that allow patriarchal ideology to occupy the central stage—the grotesque repulsive pictures of Akunna’s psychological state; the elopement and marriage to Chike signals a guilt-producing superego of oedipal process, the unconscious consequence that plagues her conscience (Eagleton 2008:136).

With the dilemma enumerated above, we must understand that Akunna’s choice of man for marriage, an “Osu” (a Slave) ultimately is her unique aggressive method of challenging patriarchal conditions (oedipal norms) that limit female happiness. Unfortunately, these oedipal norms hinged on mythical beliefs and taboos of Ibuza cultural milieu culminated into family and community rejection that caused her emotional torment—*oedipal guilt*.

Whatever, of course, is the sociological or cultural imperative that forced Akunna to marry a slave, this very act has created one certain desirable effect—*castration*. Akunna and her lover, Chike are rejected by her extended family and the Ibuza community. Happiness has eluded Akunna since the fifty pound bride price offered to her uncle, Okonkwo is rejected. This culminated in anxiety—a melancholic mood propelled by her pregnancy and the fear of birthing a child without bride price paid upon her head. Akunna’s mood is a “pathological counterpart of regret or lamentation—a disease of the conscience” (Mezu 1997: 134). The rejection of Akunna’s bride price is seen as an *oedipal clause*—a patriarchal influence that checkmates female liberation. Akunna’s inability to repress her guilt affects her psyche leading to nightmare, hysterical scream and occasional hallucination. But from whatever angle we view it, Akunna’s fears persisted, so much that she had begun to call out in her brief phases of sleep...covered in perspiration, begging Chike to please hold her because her uncle was trying to take her away” (Emecheta 1976:163). This inherent fear leads to mental breakdown making it impossible to complete her struggle for female emancipation—a just fight for life instinct. The patriarchal reinforcement of rejection is hinged on the consequences of the myth surrounding pregnancy without bride price—“the person who contravened was better dead. If you tried to hang on to life, you would gradually be helped towards death by psychological pressures” (Emecheta 1976:141). These are the patriarchal sentiments that worsened Akunna’s pathological condition leading to death in childbirth.

The discussion on gender-based oppression in Gloria Ogo’s *While Men Slept* centers on female oppression as a tool for exploring the darker ideology of patriarchal psyche. The female journey has become a process of subjugation—a physical journey strewn with forced marriage, stereotype, discrimination, battery and abuse leading to agony (anxiety or neurosis). One should admit that forced marriage does not promise a glint of hope to young females. This is the situation that pushes Kasiobi, Uloma’s cousin to revolt against the agencies of patriarchy by eloping with his young lover, Tobe. The narrator’s portrayal of Kasiobi as a sacrificial goat—one who “the old chief priest took by crook...yet no one dared oppose the authenticity of the god’s emissary” (Ogo 2017:97) is indeed pathetic. It is not surprising; therefore, that Kasiobi uses a subtle aggressiveness to escape oedipal suppression. Placed side by side—juxtaposed—are Akunna’s aggressive strategy for escaping male oppression and Kasiobi’s subtle strategy for asserting her freedom from the patriarchal web of exploitation. Without

claiming to have exhausted the instances of oppression in which these female characters are entangled, it is paramount to note that they are castrated from their personal ambition. Akunna and Kasiobi are castrated from marrying men of their choice, while Uloma is alienated for not bearing sons. This deliberate castration has resulted in an image-destructive assertiveness in the forms of elopement, disillusionment and depression.

Ogo's *While Men Slept* may make a female martyr out of Uloma who is unhappy for being battered and verbally abused by an unreasonable husband. Uloma has never been free from the abuses of her bitter-ridden husband. According to the narrator, "the only thing wrong in that house is the lack of a male child. An issue that lies entirely in the hands of Uloma's unheeding Chi" (Ogo 2017:161). There is so much bitterness and violence exhibited by Ikemba that one seems to question "what a son has to do with him beating up his wife" (Ogo 2017: 161). Every insult unleashed on Uloma seems to be shrouded in male child syndrome—Ikemba's voice vibrates with utmost disgust "useless woman! Just one son, you cannot give me. The day you say my name again, it will be the last word you would utter. Rubbish!" (Ogo 2017:172) What follows the threat is an act of violence "...Ikemba quaking with anger, tossed his corn cob at her, and gave her a thunderous slap GBOSA!"(Ogo 2017:173) Uloma's condition is indeed pitiable as a malnourished pregnant young woman starved of food and affection. Lack of these two essentials leads to mental and physical breakdown—a double exhaustion that causes sudden pregnancy labour. The cultural conception exhibited by Ogo in the novel contextualizes the notion of Afro-Feminisms which is non-confrontational. The accommodationist tendencies displayed by Uloma who did not see his abusive husband as an enemy clearly shows her Afro-feminist stance. Her tolerance to her husband's abusive attitude supports oppressive structure without combativeness. To defy oppression, Uloma merely laments: "my transgression in a previous life might have warranted an atonement of this sort" (Ogo 2017:170). Uloma's non-confrontational stance places her husband within the domain of power that heightened her oppression.

One must not close one's eyes to the oppressive patriarchal conspiracy that undermines Uloma's self-worth leaving her at the mercy of her husband—"she wailed faintly. Her face crumbled. Bitter tears slid down her cheeks, like raindrops on pumpkin leaf. Hot liquid slipped between her thighs and drenched her wrapper. She saw the red patch gather...blood. It is not supposed to rain at this time of the year. A numb part of her mind prompted" (Ogo 2017:174). The vision of doom visible in the above quotation is linked to action marked by anxiety or fear. In fact, Uloma's condition is situated in-between human instinctual impulses and her husband's inhuman treatment. A general perception of oppression captures intertwined emotion of fear and loss of consciousness: "pain brought Uloma back to consciousness. It pierced through the blackness that had swallowed her. An Owl hooted not far away and she looked around. The light from the half-moon offered little vision" (Ogo 2017:174). This is indeed a psychological disturbance with a substantial manifestation of physical pain and mental health impairment. In dissolving the distressing symptoms, Uloma, "alone and afraid, pushed in great pain, until the child came. She ran a hand weakly over the tiny bundle, and froze. It was a boy. As the cosmic cruelty hit her, she acknowledged that the gods had dealt her a vicious hand...The torrential rain hammered mercilessly on her bare back. Sprawled on the ground, shielding the child with her naked body, she prayed for dawn" (Ogo 2017:174). Uloma's life-threatening situation is very oppressive leading to memory disorder that overwhelms her ordinary systems. In fact, her unconscious mental processes lack a sense of control, connection and meaning—an extraordinary event that has overwhelmed her adaptations to life (Herman 1993:33). The analysis of the selected novels provides perspectives that restrict the female gender within the

ambits of patriarchal culture. The unique consideration of female happiness is replete with numerous confrontation of cultural tenets which does not encourage complementarity in marriage. Uloma's attitude to negotiate spaces with her husband brought about her careless death. Akunna whose is imbued with western radical traits also lacks the mental tenacity for self-definition within her traditional society. Specifically, the totality of feminine expression inherent in the selected novels acknowledges that repressed emotion causes psychological bondage which entails the erosion of female happiness.

Conclusion

This research has explicated different aspects of gender-based oppression from the perspectives of psychological trauma caused by castration and repression—a textual witness to horrible events surrounding the female gender in marriage. The novels of Emecheta and Ogo who are female writers offer interesting points on gender-based oppression. In this research, it has been ascertained that the female writers' efforts in detailing female pains and assertive dispositions towards male oppression have resulted in a tragic nervous wreck—a doubtful psychological state of mind in their female protagonists. In *While Men Slept*, “Uloma knew her journey of sorrow was at end, as she felt the last spark of life ebb away. A violent spasm raked her body, and as her drooping eyelids closed in an eternal slumber, she made one last request to her *Chi*. ‘Please, *Chukwu*, in my next life, give me a kinder destiny” (Ogo 2017: 175). *The Bride Price* also has captured Akunna's neurotic end which is caused by oedipal guilt which is non-therapeutic. “Over and over again, she heard this voice calling her, telling her she must come back to her family, to her people”. This fear is a reminiscence of nightmares and hysterical screams that often leave her unconscious at night (Emecheta 1976:163-164). Note that the two protagonists in the female writers' novels died after birthing their babies. Their tragic end is the resultant effect of patriarchal hegemony—a psychic mode that has held the female protagonists in perpetual oppression and subjugation.

Notably, Emecheta's Akunna has absorbed radical feminist tenets in her self-assertive journey, while Ogo's Uloma has adopted the womanist and accommodationist tenets in her subtle assertive journey. Akunna has strongly revolted against an imposed rapist husband, Okoboshi and eloped with a slave, Chike. Uloma's case is different because she remained and died in her husband's house despite his abusive traits. The psychological disorientation of these female protagonists is driven by their efforts to resist and escape male oppression. Sadly, they seem defeated as they lost their lives in their quest for assertiveness—a search for female liberation.

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