

CHILD ABUSE IN THE IGBO FAMILY: AN ANALYSIS OF OSUAGWU'S *NWA NGWII PUO EZE*

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Abstract

Child abuse is a problematic phenomenon the world over, and a practice that has received much condemnation from local and international agencies. Much has been written on the subject by scholars, especially social scientists, but regrettably, little or no attention has been paid to it by literary scholars. Consequently, this study examines child abuse in Igbo literature with a view to estimating the factors responsible for the abuse and the effects of the abuse on the abuser and the abused in the Igbo society. Bertram Osuagwu's drama text *Nwa Ngwii Puo Eze* was purposively selected due to its thematic focus on the subject of child abuse. Bowlby's (1973) Attachment Theory was used as analytical guide in the study. The result shows four factors accountable to abuse in the drama, as follows: ideological, social, psychological, and emotional factors. The belief among the Igbo that poor children who eventually come by fortune would turn against their benefactor fueled the maltreatment of the protagonist Uwadiogwu by his boss, Ulumma. A second reason behind the abuse of Uwadiogwu is the usual social condition of orphans who are left at the mercy of a careless society. A third and more compelling factor is that, having been a victim of abuse herself, Ulumma was psychologically disposed to dispense with abuse on Uwadiogwu, as a means of revenge. Finally, emotional inadequacy, manifested by fear of the educational future of her own children pushed Ulumma into denying Uwadiogwu of his right to education. The implications of abuse was evident in Uwadiogwu's emotional, social, and psychological inhibition, Ulumma's loss of her own child as a result of Uwadiogwu's miscalculation traceable to his abuse, and Uwadiogwu's eventual loss of teaching job in a school. It is recommended that a systematic approach be adopted to stop the trend in abuse of subordinate people such as house helps because in the medium or long term, society may begin to suffer the ill outcome in the form of armed robbery, banditry, terrorism and other sinister social evils.

Keywords: Igbo drama, child abuse, *Nwa Ngwii Puo Eze*, Bertram Osuagwu, Attachment Theory

Introduction

Child abuse is a common phenomenon in the society all over the world; the practice is a reflection of society's stratification whereby some people in privileged and dominant positions oppress others who are below them. In the family, the structure pits parents at the top of the hierarchy above children and least, servants as the case may be. In Africa, it is rare to find parents who maltreat their own children; what is rather pervasive is the incident of maltreatment of servants (house helps) or step-children. The subject of the wicked stepmother comes to mind; this character is common in African and Igbo folklore. In such tales, the stepmother maltreats the child(ren) of the first wife who had died, or the stepmother maltreats an orphan servant who is living with her. Abuses of this nature include denying the child basic needs such as food, shelter, medi-care, etc. Sometimes such unfortunate children are made to undertake herculean tasks like splitting firewood or tasked to proceed on dangerous errands in wild forests and rivers replete with wild animals and evil spirits, all at the peril of their lives. Generally, such orphans suffer untold hardship and are left at the mercy of the society. While such ill treatment is meted to the poor child, the children of the woman are pampered and bequeathed with all they need to be successful in life.

Some of these experiences are reflected in Igbo philosophy; for instance, an Igbo proverb says that *ikpo nkita oku were okpiri chere ya* 'to summon a dog while holding a stick with which to beat it'. Evident in this saying is the disproportionate disparity in the handling of the legitimate child and the slave child. Notably, the idea behind maltreatment of the orphans/slaves is that they are sub-human or non-human and therefore do not deserve humane treatment. Despite the fact that they are not physically deficient or bereft of moral or mental capacities, they are nevertheless seen as marginal beings because of their

social status. As a matter of fact, in some cases, the orphan/slave may be more physically or mentally endowed than the legitimate child and this fact may become one of the reasons for their maltreatment. In cases like this, the abusing stepmother is seen to be envious of the orphan/slave who, by all standards, is better than her own child(ren). She therefore strives by every means at her disposal to deprive and subjugate the orphan/slave to perpetuate their low estate and ensure they do not attain the social status of her own children.

Child maltreatment is not restricted to Africa; it is also common in advanced European societies. The *Cinderella* fairy tale is the story of the titular character who was maltreated by her wicked stepmother and jealous stepsisters. She was deprived from attending the Royal Ball to meet the Prince, until her fairy godmother appears and transforms her. This fairy tale is reminiscent of many tales in Igbo and other African folktales where a wicked stepmother covertly or overtly denies a beautiful orphan damsel the chance of being enlisted as a candidate to be considered by the prince for marriage. Incidentally, the subject of maltreatment has transcended the oral period and had gained appreciable attention in modern creative writing. In English fiction, Charles Dicken's *Oliver Twist*, presents an orphan boy (among others) who was abused by the establishment in the Workhouse where he was born, later sold to an undertaker as an apprentice, until he could not endure the maltreatments and fled to London where he joined a gang of juvenile criminals. The subject of child maltreatment may not be a recurring theme in Igbo written literature as it was in oral literature, but definitely it is not totally forgotten. In the present study, attention is focused on an Igbo drama text written by Bertram Osuagwu centered on child abuse in the family. The objective is to examine the factors responsible for the abuse and the effects of the abuse on the abuser and the abused.

Concept of child abuse

In common terms, child maltreatment is the improper handling of a child in a way that limits and deprives her of due welfare and rights. According to Robinson & Breaux (2019), although child maltreatment and child abuse are used interchangeably sometimes, the latter is subsumed under the former; that is, child maltreatment encapsulates the idea of child abuse and neglect. According to Boswell (1996: 87), it is widely acknowledged that child abuse is a complex concept which does not easily lend itself to definition and for this reason the NSPCC (in Cawson et al, 2000) identified three factors for this difficulty, as follows:

- (1) The difficulty of identifying the boundaries between maltreatment and other forms of harm, including harm from less-than-optimal parenting or from social factors, such as poverty.
- (2) What is seen as 'acceptable' treatment of children varies across cultures, countries and generations. What is viewed as acceptable behavior in some countries, such as the use of corporal punishment, is no longer acceptable in others.
- (3) Policy and practice have so far been unable to develop a single definition of abuse or neglect which can be understood by all while considering the great variety of harms that children can experience, the possibility of both primary and secondary harm and how children's experiences of harm can vary throughout their childhood.

This is not to say that no definite definition exists; the concept has been viewed as any action or inaction on the part of parent(s) that results in serious harm to a child, serious physical or emotional harm, sexual abuse or exploitation, or death of the child (Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, (U.S.C.A in Robinson & Breaux, 2019).

Following from the definition, child maltreatment as a concept comprises physical abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. All of them constitute harm that parent (s) or caregivers inflict on the child. Neglect involves positive or good things that a parent or caregiver deliberately denies the child to limit them. These could be physical neglect, emotional neglect, educational neglect, and medical neglect. Physical abuse constitutes harm inflicted on the body of a child. According to Saisan, Smith, & Segal, (2011), signs of physical abuse/neglect include bruises on

the child's body that are at different stages of healing, scars, representing healed bruises, and injuries on the thighs and chest areas of the body. Emotional abuse comprises of damage inflicted on the mind of a child that leaves its mark in arrested development, poor self-esteem, depression, violent acts, etc. (Spertus, Yehuda, Wong, Halligan, & Seremetis, 2003; Lau et al., 2009). This effect stems from acts such as verbally abusing a child in public, incessant threats to a child, or withdrawing contact with a child (Saisan et al., 2011; Lau, Krase, & Morse, 2009). Sexual abuse represents various sexual acts meted out to a child that serve as an exploitation of her innocence. Texas penal code defines it as sexual behaviour detrimental to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including indecency with a child or sexual assault (Robinson & Breaux, 2019). The experience of child maltreatment/abuse may not be the same in every culture, but it is a behavior exhibited by parents or care-givers in one way or another. This study will focus on the idea of child abuse in Igbo society as reflected in the drama written by Bertram Osuagwu.

Theoretical Framework

The theory chosen to guide this study is the Attachment Theory. The Theory was developed by Bowlby (1973) and expanded by Ainsworth (1978). The idea of attachment is used to describe the affective connection or bond that develops between a child and parent or care-giver. However, attachment is neither a feature of the child nor a feature of the parent or care-giver. Rather, it is a pattern of emotional and behavioural proximity that develops over time as the child and caregiver relate; this bonding is especially manifested in the context of the child's needs and demands for attention and comfort (Bowlby, 1982; Ainsworth et al, 1978). Bowlby (1973: 292) defined the idea of attachment as "any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other differentiated and preferred individual, usually conceived as stronger and/or wiser". Earlier, Bowlby (1969) posited that the survival of humans and, especially, children is best guaranteed when proximity to an attachment figure is maintained; that is, the complementary attachment of children to their parents and care-giving of parents to the children. Ainsworth et al, (1978) expanded Bowlby's (1973) concept of attachment and categorized, different types of attachment behavior as follows: 1) secure attachment, 2) insecure-avoidant attachment, 3) insecure-ambivalent attachment, and 4) disorganized-disoriented attachment.

A secure attachment is characterized by parents playing their natural roles toward the child. In a secure relationship, the parent or caregiver is attentive and responsive to the needs of the child; the attention given the child results in the child developing a sense of dependence on the parent or caregiver. Tarabulsky et al, (2008: 323) state that "a secure child who has received consistent, sensitive, and attentive care is able to strike a balance between autonomous exploration of his or her own environment and dependency". This implies that, although the child may behave in a way that suggests that they are independently minded, they are usually conscious of their dependence to the parents or caregiver. Schofield and Beek, (2014) corroborate this view by positing that, children who receive attentive and responsive attachment figures develop the kind of trust that allows them to explore their world, knowing that if they need assistance, or, when they are upset and anxious, they can return to their 'secure base' or parent/guardian as a safe haven. Shemmings, (2011) suggests that the benefit of secure attachment to children are as follows: higher sense of empathy and self-esteem; ability to deal with stress more effectively; faster memory recall; higher impulse control; reliable and likely to be popular with others.

An insecure-avoidant attachment is characterized by a disconnection between the child and the parent/caregiver. In this kind of attachment, the child feels insecure and consequently withdraws physically and emotionally from the parent or caregiver and does not depend on the parent or caregiver to assist her or manage her distress. Insecure-avoidant attachment tends to manifest when it is difficult for the caregiver to respond sensitively to the needs of the child. As a result, the child, upon noticing that the parent or caregiver is insensitive to her needs, withdraws from them. The kind of parenting experienced by these children is hostile, rejecting and controlling, and consequently the children see themselves as neither loved nor loveable. Children react by stifling their feelings because of their fear that any demonstration of emotion or need may not receive the expected response from the parent or caregiver (Shemmings, 2011; Brown and Ward, 2013).

Insecure-ambivalent attachment is characterized by tension and resistance from the child toward the insensitive parent or caregiver. The variety of attachment tends to occur when the caregiver fails to respond consistently to the child's demands. Tarabulsy et al., (2008: 323) opine that an insecure-ambivalent child "demonstrates resistance and behavioral conflict with the parent or excessive immaturity as a way of attracting and maintaining the caregiver's attention and monitoring skills". In this instance, the child expresses her desire for the care-giver's attention through behaviour that show tension and anxiety. In order to attract the attention of the caregiver, the child exaggerates her attachment behaviour. Due to the fact that she cannot easily attract the attention of the caregiver, she is usually angry with the caregiver, and frustrated that her needs are not noticed; this frustration is reflected in disobedience, deliberate destruction of things in the house or even in resisting the attempts of the caregiver to control her (Shemmings, 2011; Brown and Ward, 2013).

Disorganised-disoriented attachment is characterized by a lack of dependence on the caregiver by the child due to the psychological state of the caregiver. In this case, the parent or caregiver is usually uncomfortable and restive at the presence of the child; therefore, the children cannot depend on the parent or caregiver for comfort and protection. Such parents demonstrate atypical responses to signals made by children and behave in a frightening manner when near a child (Tarabulsy et al., 2008). In other words, the caregiver is unable to interpret or decode the signs made by children for attention when they are in need. Brown and Ward, (2013) attest that such children may be afraid of approaching their caregiver due to the fact that they cannot predict whether the caregiver will receive them with cuddles or attack them with shouting and smacking; as a result, the children often find themselves in a dilemma and are emotionally unstable. They are of the opinion that, only a minority number of children develop this attachment style but, a majority of maltreated children develop disorganized attachment (Also, Cicchetti, Rogosch, & Toth, 2006; Zeanah & Smyke, 2005).

In summary, although Ainsworth et al's, theory have four components, it is easy to separate secure attachment from the rest of the three other insecure attachment styles. Notably, there is a thin line between the three insecure attachment styles (insecure-avoidant, insecure-ambivalent and disorganised-disoriented), which implies that an individual or child may manifest more than one of them, or even the whole three, at the same time. However, there is a consensus among researchers that children who are physically abused and neglected have more inclination to demonstrate insecure attachment than children who have not undergone physical abuse or neglect (Schneider-Rosen, Braunwald, Carlson, & Cicchetti, 1985; Carlson, Cicchetti, Barnett, & Braunwald, 1989; Lyons-Ruth, Connell, & Zoll, 1989;).

Method

Igbo written literature encompasses the three literature genres of novel, drama and poetry, and they cover various themes in the society. Amongst all, Osuagwu's *Nwa ngwii puo eze* was purposively selected for this study. It was selected on the basis of the major theme of the drama text which is child maltreatment in the family. Drama was selected due to the fact that, for performative reasons, drama captures and reflects real life more than the novel or poetry. Through acting, the characters come alive and re-enact reality and our social condition in a way that leaves no one in doubt. Only one drama text was selected for this study because, the drama text is found sufficient to extract adequate data for analysis. Secondly, since the study is not a comparative one, there is no compelling reason to include another text.

Data and analysis

In this section, data from the drama text will be presented and analyzed in the following order: trajectory of abuse, dimensions of abuse, motivations for abuse, and effects of abuse.

Trajectory of abuse seeks to evaluate the direction of abuse from one point to another, or from one character in the drama to another. In the text, it is shown that the maltreatment stems from a stepmother to a young boy in the family of the protagonist, Amadi. Ułumma, the wife of Amadi is the culprit or

abuser, while Uwadiegwu, Amadi's nephew is the victim of abuse. Ułumma is suggested by a pedestrian character Oringaohuruokwu as evil-natured as seen in Act 1, Scene 3:

Oringaohuruokwu: Amadi, Ułumma ga-egbu giegbu...Amadi, I zuru ahia ngwugwu n'ebe Ułumma no. Ma jide ndu gi aka nwaanyi ojoo a egbuo gi.

Oringaohuruokwu: Amadi, Ułumma will kill you...Amadi, you bought a parcel in the case of Ułumma. But be careful with your life, lest this evil woman kills you.

In this excerpt, Oringaohuruokwu refers to Ułumma as an evil woman and advises Amadi to be cautious lest he is killed by the evil woman. It is true that although the character - Oringaohuruokwu is a mad person in the community, his voice is seen as the voice of reason. The Igbo believe that, *onyeara na uche ya yi* "the mad person is with his/her senses" meaning that madness does not translate to stupidity. A mad person may be incoherent, inarticulate, and disjointed in speech, but that does not imply that they don't make sense. As a matter of fact, in so many communities, including the Igbo, it is mad people who are bold enough to say the truth that sane people are afraid to say. This is because, on one hand, insanity grants them absolute franchise and license to utter things, and on the other hand, grants them censorship and immunity from consequences of their utterance. The mad character only confirms what is obvious about Ułumma's nature, as the drama is replete with the maltreatment that she metes out to Uwadiegwu, her husband's nephew. These series of abuse will be made clear in the next section dealing with dimensions of abuse in the text.

In the text, the dimensions of abuse from the abuser to the victim are both physical and emotional; the victim is beaten, starved, over-laboured, and deprived of his rights in the family. In Act 2, Scene 2, after she lost her child through Uwadiegwu's inattentiveness, Ułumma remarked to her husband:

Ułumma: Amadi, Di m ihulanu; M kwuo gi asi, mu kuo ya ihe, gi abawa mba. Mu enyeghi ya nri gi asi na mu bu agbara.

Ułumma: Amadi, my husband, you have seen it; When I talk, you will complain; when I beat him, you will reprimand me. When I don't give him food, you will say that I am a goddess.

This fact is confirmed by Uwadiegwu himself while assuring his headmaster in school that he is a hard-working person, as seen in Act 2, Scene 4:

Uwadiegwu: Kamgbe uwa m, a na m aga ihe n'oge n'ihina a bu m nwa ngwii. O buru na mu ejeghi ozi n'oge, nne m ukwu na-egbu m ilu ojoo.

Uwadiegwu: Since my life, I do things on time because I am a poor child. If I do not finish my chores on time, my big mother gives me terrible beating.

In the first instance, while trying to justify her position on maltreatment, Ułumma herself testifies to her husband that she used to beat Uwadiegwu and starve him of food although he (Amadi) was against the ill treatments. In the second case, Uwadiegwu confirms that when he failed to round off his duties on time, he is usually subjected to intense beating by Ułumma. The words used by Uwadiegwu to describe the beating *ilu ojoo* 'bad beating' shows that it is beyond what is normal. The fact that her husband Amadi complains about the beating is also proof that the beatings were either too extreme or totally unwarranted and unprovoked. Amadi's reference to his wife as *agbara*, when she starved Uwadiegwu is an evidence that indeed Ułumma is evil and possibly Uwadiegwu had not done anything deserving of starvation. The term *agbara* is used in Igbo to describe women who are tough, and in some cases out rightly wicked and difficult to deal with. Such physical abuses are meant to put the poor boy in his place as a slave in the family. Beating and starving are a constant reminder to the victim of his lot in life and aimed at weakening the victim, so that he will remain subservient to the oppressor.

Emotional abuses by the abuser to the victim are reflected in words used to address the victim during interaction. In the text, Ułumma directs verbal abuses at the victim as shown in the following scenes:

Act 1, Scene 3 (while Uwadiegwu was appealing to Ułumma to allow him to go to school);

Ułumma: A na-agwa unu bu umu ngwii okwu, obi unu atugoro n'ithe unu bu n'obi...Anu ohi.

Ułumma: When you wretched children are addressed, your mind is fixed on what you have in mind...Animal.

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu, nwa mgbabi a, I siri gini? Afọ gbagbuokwa gi, anuohia. O zuola gi; ya ha gi otua! Puo m n'ihu!

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu, this destructive child, what did you say? May you die of runny stomach, animal. I have had enough from you; Leave my presence.

Act 2, Scene 3 (When Uwadiegwu did an aside as she interpreted his teacher's English to Amadi and Ułumma);

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu, I si gini? I kporo m aha? A-a-amadioha kugbuokwa gi Oo ya diwanu. Nwa anuohia a na-akpo m iyi n'ihu nna ya ukwu.

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu, what did you say? Did you call my name? May amadioha kill you. It's alright. This animal is abusing me in the presence of his master.

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu ajo nwa...nwata etoghi eto chowa ihe gburu nna ya, ihe gburu nna ya egbuo ya...nwata mgbabi ihe oma na-agba afọ.

Ułumma: Uwadiegwu evil child...an immature child that seeks what killed his/her father, what killed his/her father will kill him...destructive child that hates good things.

In these excerpts, Ułumma used the following derogatory terms and curses to address Uwadiegwu: *nwa ngwii* "wretched boy", *anuohia* "animal", *nwa mgbabi* "destructive child", and *ajo nwa* 'evil child', *afọ gbagbuokwa gi* 'may you die of running stomach', *amadioha kugbuokwa gi* 'may amadioha (god) kill you' Addressing the victim with such offensive words as poor and wretched is a tactful means employed by Ułumma to limit the victim's aspirations in life. She is telling him that he cannot rise above his impoverished state. Incidentally, this is against the background that Uwadiegwu is heir to his late father's wealth, which was inherited by Amadi; hence Uwadiegwu ought not to have much financial challenges, not to talk of being poor. In spite of that fact, Ułumma tries to drum it into the ears of the victim that circumstances and vicissitudes of life have brought him down to the level of a pauper.

The term *anuohia* 'animal' suggests that Uwadiegwu is sub-human or a base creature; the term is used by Ułumma to thwart the psyche of the victim, Uwadiegwu, so that he will see himself as an animal and therefore does not deserve to be treated like a human being. Hence, the maltreatments such as starving and intense beating which are normally inflicted on beasts of burden such as donkeys, horses, cows, etc. The term *nwa mgbabi* 'child of destruction' is used to show that Uwadiegwu is destructive in nature; that is, he is not born to build but to destroy, hence he is later blamed by Ułumma for the slide in their (Ułumma, Amadi) fortune. The term *ajo nwa* 'evil child' is used by Ułumma to paint the victim black so as to justify her maltreatment of him. This is akin to giving a dog a bad name in order to kill it, just like the Igbo would say. Although there is no concrete proof or evidence advanced by Ułumma about Uwadiegwu with regards to being destructive or evil, it is obvious that Ułumma deploys any offensive word at her disposal to target the emotional stability of the victim.

Aside the name-calling, Ułumma also employed curses to attack the emotions of the victim. The two curses used are *afọ gbagbuokwa gi* 'may you die of runny stomach' and *amadioha kugbuokwa gi* 'may amadioha (god) kill you'. These curses vividly exhibit the evil heart of the abuser and her hatred for Uwadiegwu. The curses underline the fact that she wishes death on the poor victim. Amadioha is the

god of thunder in Igbo cosmology; it is a destructive god that is said to kill its victim at the height of the person's success in life. Invoking such a death on the poor boy reveals the degree of bitterness and odium she holds against the victim. On the whole, the derogatory words used by Ułumma on Uwadięgwu was meant to kill his self-esteem.

Another dimension to the abuse is deprivation of the victim of his basic rights as a member of the larger Nwokoro family. Uwadięgwu is denied right to education and freedom of speech. His father, Chukwuma was rich and had prepared well for his education until his life was cut short by a fatal accident, as seen in Act 1, Scene 1:

Chukwuma: E nwere m ego nkeukwu. E nwere m ala nweekwa otutu ulo ahia...O buru skukul, o bu nwa m Uwadięgwu ga-ejelite ya elu. Skukul m ga-eje bu izu Uwadięgwu. O ga-eje uloakwukwo nta, jee uloakwukwo ukwu. Emesija, a ga m eziga ya ofe mmiri ka o muruo akwukwo ebe o kwesiri.

Chukwuma: I am very rich. I have land and many shops....If it is schooling, it is my child Uwadięgwu that will go. The school I will attend is to train Uwadięgwu. He will attend lower school, attend higher school Thereafter, I will send him overseas so that he will be properly educated.

In keeping with Chukwuma's dreams, Amadi is interested in Uwadięgwu's education, but Ułumma objects to it and insists that Uwadięgwu will not go to school, as seen in the following excerpts between her and Amadi in Act 1, Scene 3:

Amadi: ...Biko were nwa a bu Uwadięgwu Odinkemere dika out n'ime umuaka gi. I ga na-enyeju ya afo. O ga-eje skukul jee muo akwukwo dika ibe ya.

Amadi: ...Please take this child, who is Uwadięgwu Odinkemere, as one of your children. You should feed him very well. He will go to school and learn like others.

Ułumma: I kwuchaala? O gwula ka oforo? I si onye kuwe umuaka ndia ma o buru na Uwadięgwu ga-eje koleji?... Abu m ohu gi na ya? Skukul gbaakwa oku! Ya bia jeenu

Ułumma: Have you finished? Has it finished or are there more? Who do you want to babysit these children, if Uwadięgwu will go to college?...Am I a slave for you and he? May school be burnt in fire! Let him come and go.

Against the advice of her husband, Amadi, Ułumma prefers to use Uwadięgwu as baby-sitter instead of enrolling him in school. The words *skukul gbaakwa oku* 'may school be burnt' underlines her objection to Uwadięgwu's academic career. Although the poor boy eventually proceeds to school, on account of Amadi's insistence, Uwadięgwu's aspiration was plagued by paucity of funds to pay school fees and other requirements like uniforms. The dearth of funds was, however, a fallout of Ułumma's profligate lifestyle. The attempt to deprive the poor boy of education was targeted at his future. Certainly, the abuser understands the value of education (although she lacks it) and benefits accruing to its acquisition, hence her attempt to deny the poor boy of that which can equip him for the future and possibly put him above her.

Aside depriving him of right to education, Ułumma also deprived Uwadięgwu of right to free speech in the family. On several occasions, Ułumma intimidates Uwadięgwu to silence so that he will not be able to express himself, as seen in the following scenes:

Act 1, Scene 3 (as Uwadięgwu insists on going to school against Ułumma's position):

Uwadięgwu: Biko nne m ukwu, a ga m eje akwukwo, jee mta otu e si ede ihe na otu e si agu ihe dika umuaka ibe m.

Uwadięgwu: Please my big mother, I will go to school to learn how to write and how to read things like my fellow children.

Ułumma: Taa nwatakiri a mechie onu. Onye kporo gi? Olee nke mu na gi ji?

Ułumma: Shut up your mouth, this little boy. Who called you? What do you and I have in common?

Act 2, Scene 2 (as Uwadięgwu cries and laments his pitiful condition):

Uwadięgwu: Nne m kporo m Uwadięgwu; Nna m kporo m Odinkemere; Nwa enwe nne; Ahushiele m anya....

Uwadięgwu: My mother called me Uwadięgwu; My father called me Odinkemere; A child without mother; I have suffered so much....

Ułumma: Taa, nwatakiri mgbabi a, mechie onu gi!

Ułumma: Shut your mouth up, you destructive child!

The text reveals the attempt made by Ułumma to deny Uwadięgwu right to free speech in the family, even in matters that concern his welfare. She wants to be the sole determinant of Uwadięgwu's life and interests, and therefore bars the poor boy from expressing himself. On these two occasions Uwadięgwu tried to express his desire to go to school, but Ułumma raises her voice against him and orders him to keep mute. The obvious implication of this stifling is that Uwadięgwu is a slave in the house. Slaves do not have the freedom to complain about their condition; rather they are expected to accept their fate in life and acquiesce to any decision taken on their existence by their master or owner.

Motivations for abuse

In the text, there are factors seen to be responsible for the abuse meted on Uwadięgwu by Ułumma. The factors are ideological, social, cultural, and psychological.

First, the ideological basis for maltreatment derives from the proverb used by Ułumma to justify her ill treatment of Uwadięgwu when Amadi indicted Ułumma of being wasteful and advised her to be more prudent and economical with scarce resources, as seen in Act 1, Scene 3:

Ułumma: Amadi, I si na mu na-emefu ego, ebe o bu gi dobere m nwa ngwii n'ulo si mu zujisiwe aka?.. O di ka I chefuru si na nwa ngwii puo eze, o tagbuo onye zuru ya.

Ułumma: Amadi, did you say that I am wasting money, when you are the one who kept a poor boy in the house for me to suffer training...It seems that you have forgotten that if a poor child grows teeth, he/she will bite their trainer to death.

Act 2, Scene 4 (While Amadi and Ułumma are discussing Uwadięgwu's sojourn to America to pursue university education):

Ułumma: O kaa o mee. Unu ahulanu ihe ahụ m na-ekwu maka ya...Umụ ngwii! O bu otu o na-adi ha. Ha amaghị mmezi; ha amaghị ihe oma. O bu ka o si adi ha.

Ułumma: He or she who says and it comes to pass. You people have seen what I have been saying...Poor children! That is how they behave. They don't know how to repay good; they don't know how to do good. That is how things are for them.

This proverb which is also the title of the drama is a belief among the Igbo about poor children. The proverb *nwa ngwii puo eze, otagbuo onye zuru ya* 'if a poor child grows teeth, he/she will bite to death their trainer' suggests that if a poor person eventually becomes rich, he/she will turn against his/her benefactor. The proverb describes a poor child as a toothless being without the capacity to bite; that is,

one who is so miserable they cannot help themselves. In other words, poor children are ingrates who do not look back to remember the one(s) who helped them when they were suffering. This is against an Igbo belief, enshrined in the proverb which says that *okuko anaghị echefu onye foro ya odu n'udummiri* 'a fowl does not forget the one who helped to dry its tail in the rainy season'. While the latter proverb is generic, using the fowl as a symbol or archetype of everyman, the former proverb is particular, using *nwa ngwii* 'poor person' to depict the reality and experience of aiding ingrates. Apparently, this belief influenced Ułumma's perception of Uwadiegwu, and strengthened her position that it is pointless and a waste of resources training Uwadiegwu since he will not reciprocate the gesture in future. This is a suggestion that, it is in the nature and genetic code of such poor and helpless children to turn against their benefactor upon experiencing a change of fortune.

A second factor accountable for the maltreatment of Uwadiegwu is social; poor orphans are usually at the mercy of the society. They are treated as dregs of the society, hence not catered for. This is bluntly expressed by Ułumma while Amadi was trying to persuade her to accept that Uwadiegwu will go to school, as seen in Act 1, Scene 3:

Amadi: Biko were nwa a bu Uwadiegwu Odinkemere dika out n'ime umuaka gi...O ga-eje skuul jee muo akwukwo dika ibe ya.

Amadi: Please take this child who, is Uwadiegwu Odinkemere, as one of your children...He will go to school to study like his fellows.

Ułumma: Ikwuchaala? Ogwula ka oforo? ...Ihula onye nne ya na nna ya nwuru n'ala unu na-eje akwukwo?

Ułumma: Have you finished? Have you finished or is there more?.. Have you seen anyone in your village who lost mother and father, who went to school?

Ułumma hinges her reason for standing against Uwadiegwu's education on the fact that, in their community, there is no orphan who ever went to school. It is like an unwritten rule. Orphans and less privileged do not usually go to school because there is no one to fund their education. Consequently, their academic aspiration is foreclosed, and an uncertain future awaits them. In Uwadiegwu's case, there is ample fund left by his father Chukwuma to offer him the highest academic training, but Ułumma hangs on societal norm to ensure that Uwadiegwu is not an exception to this anomalous rule.

A third factor responsible for maltreatment in the text is psychological; Ułumma had suffered abuse herself when she was a house help in the house of Adaego (Amadi's cousin) as seen in Act 1, Scene 3:

Ułumma: Eme n'elu, Ułumma, e mee n;ala Ułumma! Ehihie, Ułumma; Uchichi Ułumma.Naani Ułumma buzi mmadu mgbe ozi putara Nnem ukwu amaghị na echi mu ebiri nga m. Agaghị m abukwa ohu ya ozo.

Ułumma: Going up, Ułumma, going down, Ułumma! Afternoon, Ułumma; Night, Ułumma. Ułumma is the only one regarded as human when it comes to chores. My big mother does not know that by tomorrow I will live in my own house. I will no longer be her slave.

From the text, it is obvious that before her marriage to Amadi, Ułumma was enslaved by Amadi's cousin Adaego. She was overburdened with chores and suffered both physical and emotional abuses in terms of much labor and verbal attacks; hence she actually longed for the day she will be free. Fortunately, the day came when Amadi married her and relieved her of her pain and anguish in Adaego's house. As a matter of fact, one of the derogatory words used by Ułumma to label Uwadiegwu was a carryover from Adaego, as seen when Adaego overheard Ułumma's soliloquy about her condition, as seen in Act 1, Scene 3:

Adaego: Nwa mgbabi chaj, anuchaala m olu gi. Aga m ahụ ihe I ga-agho.

Adaego: This destructive child; I have heard your voice. I will see what you will become.

As earlier shown, Ułumma used the same term *nwa mgbabi* ‘destructive child’ to abuse Uwadiegwu. Additionally, Adaego’s comment that she will see what Ułumma will become seals her doubt that Ułumma will ever become successful in life. Adaego’s outrage shows glaringly that she had misused Ułumma as a house help. Incidentally, Ułumma continues the same trend of maltreatment in her own house. According to psychologists, those who have suffered abuse often have the tendency to abuse others (Schofield and Beek, 2014). Furthermore, Bowlby (1973) reasoned that, if a mother is not securely attached to anyone, it is expected that it will be difficult for her to relate with her children or others to the point of becoming securely attached to them. Expectedly, her own history of anxious attachment would increase the likelihood and propensity for her own attachment to her dependent children to be in conflict.

It seems that the abused who abuses others does that in retaliation. It is plausible to propose that, when someone is maltreated, the victim regards it as the norm, and so perpetrates and perpetuates it when he/she is in position of power. The mind of a victim of abuse is so charged with the experience and all the attendant bitterness that they long for a time to ventilate it on others, even though those others are innocent. A good example is Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*. Miss Havisham was jilted by her fiancé and lover Compeyson, a career criminal, on the altar, the same day she was to wed, and for her, life and everything stopped that fateful day. Eventually, she took her revenge on poor innocent Pip (the protagonist) for whom she arranged a certain beautiful Estella, (her adoptive daughter) giving him hope that, as his benefactor, Pip would marry Estella. In the end, Estella left Pip and married Drummle, an irresponsible scoundrel, just to spite all her suitors, including or especially Pip. Miss Havisham was happy that Pip was heartbroken, and only then did Pip realize that Miss Havisham set up everything just to hurt him in the same way she was hurt in the past by Compeyson.

A fourth factor responsible for maltreatment in the text is rivalry. Ułumma sees Uwadiegwu as a threat to her own children’s advancement in life. Since she had three children, she feels that the funds meant for Uwadiegwu’s education should rather be spent on her own children’s education, as seen during interaction with Uwadiegwu in the following scenes

Act 1, Scene 3:

Ułumma: I ga-eje skuul mgbe I kutooro umuaka m niile, I nula? Ma ugbua agwala m di m Amadi na I gaghị eje skuul ruo mgbe I kutooro umuaka m niile ha eruo ogo ije skuul n’ onwe ha.

Ułumma: You will go to school after babysitting all my children, did you hear? But now, I have told my husband, Amadi that you will not go to school until you have finished babysitting all my children, up to the point when they will be ready to go to school on their own.

Act 2, Scene 3:

Ułumma: O ga-adịnu gi mma ije koleji ma ego adighi a ga-eji azu gi. I guruo akwukwo isii gi achoro oru. O bu umuaka m ga-enwe ike ije koleji. Ekwuchaala m.

Ułumma: You will really be happy to go to college when there is no money to train you. When you reach primary six, you will look for job. It is my children that will proceed to college. Period.

Apparently, Ułumma sees Uwadiegwu as her rival and competitor over the funds left for Uwadiegwu’s education; she thinks that, if Uwadiegwu goes to primary school, as seen in Act 1, Scene 3 or college as seen in Act 2, Scene 3, that her own children may not go to school, due to shortage of funds. The presence of Uwadiegwu in the house makes her restive and all the maltreatment are geared towards depriving Uwadiegwu of the funds he needs for his education. Her complex, manifesting in a feeling of

inadequacy stems partly from the fact that she is not educated and partly from the fact that she is not resourceful, as she had recorded no success in all her attempts at business.

Effect of abuse

In the text, there are obvious implications for maltreatment on the persons involved and the community in general. The maltreatment of Uwadiegwu leaves its ugly mark on both Uwadiegwu and Ułumma as seen when Uwadiegwu leaves the child in his care to his friend Chike, as seen in Act 2, Scene 1:

Uwadiegwu: I mere nke ọma wee bịa. Biko, legidere m nwa ka m bịa. Lee ya ka ọna-aba ohia ka anya gi ruo n'ahụ ya. A na m abia.

Uwadiegwu: You did well to have come. Please, look after this child until I come. Look at him going into the bush, pay attention to him. I am coming.

In this scene, as soon as Uwadiegwu leaves the child in the care of his friend - Chike, Chike dozes off and the child wanders into the bush and is bitten by a snake and dies. The death of the child is the outcome of maltreating Uwadiegwu, in a way. Uwadiegwu could not afford to delegate his friend to take care of the child and go away for no reason. Since he did not have much chores to do that day, he probably took advantage of Ułumma's absence to go out to play and ease off the tedium of labour in the house where he was not free. It is probable that, if Uwadiegwu was humanely treated by Ułumma and not overburdened with tasks, he would have sacrificed his own comfort and convenience to attend to the child; he would not have taken the risk of leaving the child in Chike's care. In the end, the child dies and Ułumma blames Uwadiegwu for the death, instead of blaming herself for not creating the appropriate socio-psychological condition necessary for Uwadiegwu to cater for her child. The point being stressed here is that, if a woman fails to make sacrifices for the welfare of her servant, the servant would scarcely be sensitive to making sacrifices for the interest of the woman.

Secondly, the maltreatment inflicted on Uwadiegwu played a larger role in the loss of his teaching job in a school. Uwadiegwu's confrontation by his headmaster Tagboo is baseless and without justification. It was an obvious overreaction, as seen in the course of a cordial interaction between him and the headmaster, in Act 2, Scene 4:

Tagbo: O di mma, ihe di mkpa bu jisie ike hu na gi kuziri ihe nke oma.

Tagbo: It is alright, what is important is for you to endeavour to teach very well.

Uwadiegwu: Anula m ma achoputara m na I na-aghogbu umu skool nke ukwu n'ihi na I naghị eme ihe n'oge mgbe obula. Kamgbe izu uka ato mu jiri bia ebe a, ana m ahụ ihe I na-eme. O nwebeghi ubochi I biara skool n'oge. O bu otu ndi isi ulokwukwo ibe gi si eme? Ahubeghi m.

Uwadiegwu: I have heard but I have noticed that you are shortchanging pupils very well because you do not do things on time all the time. Since three weeks I came here, I have been seeing what you are doing. There has never been a day you come to school on time. Is this how your fellow headmasters behave? I have not seen.

There is no justification for Uwadiegwu to frontally confront and reprimand his boss in this hostile and insolent manner. Even if he was right about Tagboo's negative attitude to work, the onus is not on him to call him to order, much more since he had just spent three weeks as a teacher in the school. Due to administrative and other engagements the headmaster is saddled with, he may have reasons not to come to work on time to which Uwadiegwu is not privy. Aside, as an institution, there must be systems of checks and balances to take care of lapses and misdemeanors of staff. Therefore, Uwadiegwu's action smacks of ill-breeding and delinquency. And of course, for no cause of his, he was ill-bred; the reason for Uwadiegwu's impudent antagonism of authority is traceable to his family where he had been constantly maltreated and inhibited. Finding himself in a social space where he is free, outside the bounds of his tyrannical home where he is suffocated and denied of free speech, Uwadiegwu exploits

the opportunity to express himself but unfortunately abuses it. His unprovoked vilification of his boss probably was his own means of ventilating his distress on the society. Incidentally, that rash behavior cost him his job until he finds his way to the United States. The fact is that, abused people are a problem to the society because, in most cases, they find one way or another to (consciously or unconsciously) take their revenge on the society without minding that they are upsetting the social order.

Discussion

From the perspective of Attachment Theory, the protagonist of the play (Uwadięgwu) reflects a mixture of an insecure-avoidant attachment and Disorganised-disoriented attachment. There is a grave gulf between Uwadięgwu and Ułumma to show that they have no emotional bond between them. On several occasions, Uwadięgwu would physically withdraw from her to a solitary place where he bemoans his fate. He is not emotionally attached to Ułumma but is emotionally connected to his late parents whom he always remembers when he is maltreated. On one occasion, when he was alone in the house tending Ułumma's child in Act 2 scene 1, he bemoans his fate and starts singing a sorrowful song about an orphan child who is overburdened with chores and also starved of food. In Act 2, Scene 2; as Uwadięgwu was apologising to Ułumma over her son's death, he remembered his parents and broke into tears, but Ułumma could not decode the reason for his tears, and instead of consoling him, she buffeted and cursed him. The poor boy was only seeking for her attention, but she was too far away to understand the clue. On another occasion in Act 2 scene 4, after he inadvertently lost his teaching job, he withdrew to himself and bemoaned his fate and later entrusted his life in the hands of God, since he had no parents in whom to confide. Ordinarily, Uwadięgwu would have confided in Ułumma and her husband, Amadi and probably found solace in their arms. However, since Ułumma was hostile to him, he opted for withdrawing to himself and found solace with emotional flights to the memory of his parents. It was Uwadięgwu's feeling of insecurity and inhibition that led to the death of Ułumma's child and the loss of his job. Especially, in the incident between him and his boss, it was emotional instability that resulted in such a sudden switch from an innocuous conversation with Tagboo to a toxic outburst that cost him his job. In all the instances where he is verbally abused and cursed by Ułumma, he would stifle his emotions and not react; not that he cannot react, but he would not react. On one rare occasion in Act 1, Scene 2, out of frustration he did an aside while he was interpreting his teacher's (Holyoak) English to Amadi and Ułumma and called Ułumma *amara emete* 'fastidious person'. Ułumma heard the aside, but even though she did not hear exactly what Uwadięgwu said, seizes the opportunity to curse him.

There is evidence in the drama to suggest that abused people eventually abuse others in their care (Schofield and Beek, 2014), which is evidence of insecure attachment. Schofield and Beek (2014) stress that, unattached people carry over their experiences of maltreatment to new situations. Ułumma suffered abuse in the house of Adaego, and eventually maltreated Uwadięgwu, after her marriage with Amadi. Uwadięgwu carried over his own experience to the workplace, where he challenged his boss and was discharged. This is to confirm the fact that people in any sort of insecure attachment relationship are usually plagued with anxiety. The ingrained realities of their experiences make it difficult, if not impossible to establish normal relationship with other people. Exceptions may, however, occur where the abused person moves to an environment where they have sustained positive responses from other people in relationship with them. In Uwadięgwu's case, his relocation to the United States where he met other people may have served to relieve him of his past experiences of maltreatment, sufficient for him to shed a significant part of them without them negatively impacting his relationship with others. It is evident in the text that, upon his return from the United States, he reunited with Amadi and Ułumma, and even assisted them to live a better life, despite the history of his maltreatment.

Incidentally, cases of maltreating orphans and less privileged involve mainly women as abusers or actors against their subordinates who may be male or female. Just like similar experiences in Igbo folk tales, these abuses take place under the watch of men, who are the custodians of culture. In a patriarchal society such as Igbo, it is expected that, in established cases of maltreatment of an orphan, the men should call the women to order, given their domineering role in the family. Regrettably, this is not the

case; the women perpetrate the unjust act as if the husband does not exist. However, in the present study, the drama took place in a modern Igbo society, after colonialism has left its vestiges in the customs of Africa. This is not the traditional Igbo world where women were restricted and limited to nuclear spheres. In the present study, Amadi had married Ułumma within the bounds of Christian religion that emphasizes mutual love and respect between the couple. As a result, Ułumma sees Amadi as her equal and relates with him with that understanding. This is aptly captured by the character Oringaohuruokwu in Act 1, verse 3, where he rebuked and chides Ułumma that she sees herself as equal with her husband by virtue of wedding. The mad character presents Ułumma as a feminist of sorts as she seems not to be submissive to her husband. She is assertive and usurps the authority of her husband. She is actually the one in control of the family and therefore rules and dominates her husband. Therefore, having succeeded in controlling and dominating her husband, it is easy to maltreat the poor Uwadięgwu without the husband resisting her. In such a situation where the husband is docile, he is deemed to be an accomplice in his wife's abuse of any child in his custody.

Conclusion

Maltreatment of children is a common experience in the world. It is surprising that the experience has transcended the times, from traditional periods to the modern world. It is expected that in modern times, people would have received adequate education and enlightenment to abstain from maltreating the less privileged in the society. Sadly, this is not so, as there seems to be an upsurge in the experience, as seen in growing number of cases, including organizations all over the world set up to defend abused children. The pervasive nature of the experience is also one of the reasons why it is reflected in literature. The sustenance of abuse in modern climes lends credence to the fact that, there is a natural tendency for humans to abuse those below them; it is in the human psyche to assume that being the head of an organization makes one superior and grants one the license to oppress or suppress subordinates. Incidentally, the victims of maltreatment may not fight back or resist their oppressors due to lack of capacity, but eventually, given that their psyche has been thwarted, they are no longer normal human beings, and the tendency is to upset the social order in one way or another. The experience of child abuse may be a precursor to delinquency, and later prostitution, armed robbery, banditry, terrorism, and other social vices with which the world is presently contending.

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