

## **Social Identities and Male Prejudice in Emmanuel Ifediata's *Slay Queen***

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### **Abstract**

This research has examined the patterns of male prejudice in Emmanuel Ifediata's *Slay Queen* (2019). With a glaring evidence, the study has investigated intra gender and inter gender institutional abuse based on economic exploitation, verbal abuse, discrimination, stereotype and manipulation as patterns of male oppression. The study employed Freud's Psychoanalysis and Marxist Critical Theory in interpreting the male protagonist's patterns of oppression in the proletariat domain. The paper has interpreted *Conscientization* as a major concept in Marxist Critical theory which gears towards critical social consciousness—a social concept that aids in gaining a social understanding of our world, especially in exposing oppressive orientation against the male gender. This research has also discovered through the interpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis that prejudice is a tormenting form of oppression—an injustice which controls the oppressed to act in a powerless manner which could be conscious or unconscious. The implication could result to internal conflicts or acts of physical or psychological violence.

**Keywords:** Male Prejudice, Conscientization, Psychoanalysis, Marxist Critical Theory.

### **Introduction**

Naturally, prejudice is perceived as a hostile attitude directed toward an individual or a group of individuals. Prejudice projects a hurtful resentment which targets one's whole system of existence, especially the subordinated group in society. The implication is that prejudice is an underlying trait visible in oppressive structure. It is visible in discrimination—a kind of "social problem which has eaten deep into the social circles of different African societies. It is seen in public or private sectors; religious or traditional groups as individuals in a given society engage in endless class struggles in order to control socio-economic and political powers" (Odinye 2018, 168).

Notably, the varied nature of human experiences and relationships could lead to extreme manifestation of unjust impositions—the feeling of being mentally and physically burdened. This emphasis is deeply rooted in different socio-cultural contexts with visible trends of deception, intimidation, slavery, sexual abuse, poverty, inequality, discrimination, terrorism and other noticeable crime. The important aspect of gender-based violence is hinged on the havoc caused by oppression—a burdensome or cruel pressure which is capable of causing a vicious mental disorientation. Olawale Albert (1996:7) opines that "it could be physical, sexual, and psychological occurring in the family, social and cultural circles". Walters and Parke (1964:231) as quoted in Odinye (2021:9) maintain that oppression could be individually and culturally determined—it thus gives people the privilege to harm others based on belief systems, familial and cultural background. Odinye further maintains that oppression as a puppet string of gender-based violence is "wrapped in an abusive behaviour that has a forceful

pattern of dominance and control over the victims”. The above ideology raises penetrating questions that can only arise from the perspectives of writers who allies with the sufferings of the victims in society to decry the dimensions of human exploitation as it affects the well-being of the masses—in relation to a particular gender.

Specifically, the thrust of the matter is wrapped in an ideology in which the less powerful is oppressed—an act which causes great anxiety. The reality is that most times, the oppressed either represses the unjust treatment or takes a radical step towards self-liberation which often results to severe consequences. Notably, any act of exploitation is victimization or oppression which often leaves the victim with a feeling of inadequacy submerged in disillusionment. Therefore, one should note that any repressive attitude towards oppression is a coin of two faces which adversely affects the mental well-being of the victim, disfigures him/her and could also lead to untimely death.

Over the years, female oppression has been a trending topic—a sensitive discussion with an advantageous viewpoint which stresses the fact that patriarchy applauds male superiority over the inferior female. In Africa, “women are regarded as the weaker sex and are looked upon as people who cannot stand on their own unless they are entrusted to men” (Udemba and Ojukwu 2023:154).

This ideology has consistently spurred various debates on the basis of male hierarchy—a pattern of patriarchal injustice which for ages has perceived the female gender as the weaker sex. This perception is not just a mere one. It is wrapped in an image of brutality or subjugation which expresses concern on various issues bordering on inequality, discrimination, trafficking, battery, forced marriage, rape, violence, and other cultural norms that are very oppressive to females. Sophia Ogwude (2013:2) is of the opinion that:

Feminists and some writers perhaps have grouses against patriarchy and its all-pervading ideological stances especially as evident from male-authored creative works which is hinged on the often derogatory and marginal roles assigned to the female characters in different literary works. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) first drew attention to this position which has since been corroborated by Mary Ellman’s *Thinking About Women* (1968) among others.

Although many African male writers like Chinua Achebe, Cyprain Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, Elechi Amadi and others have come under attack for depicting the derogatory positions and experiences of the female gender with a sense of realistic historical/cultural repertoire—one that consistently placed female characters in less dominant positive roles; most critics have not consciously observed the changing polemics of oppression and subjugation that have overwhelmed patriarchal expectations in recent years. The fact remains that most writers have shied away from interrogating the authenticity of male portraitures—a new patriarchal consciousness which articulates and unmasks certain unacceptable violence against the male gender. In as much as there are divergent opinions on feminism and feminist concerns; one must readily accept the fact that contemporary writers do not have to close their eyes to the truths of oppressive experiences of the male gender as drawn from the complexity of reality consciously documented in literary texts. Commenting on ethnographic evidence, Julianna Simon and Marianne Preger-Simon (2010:306) make a distinctive explanation that:

The male gender is oppressed, not just privileged in the society. They are not oppressed by women or by any particular group. They are oppressed by society as a whole, through parents, other adults, institutions, peers, and the media.

Male oppression acts to keep men and boys in particular roles, those roles the society require them to fill in order for it to function normally or effectively.

In the summation of the psychology of African cum Nigerian spaces, one must not feign ignorance of the current condition that exposes the unhappy side of life for the male gender—a mentality laced with an unwillingness to confront the humiliation of oppression sharpened by cruel actions or brutalities inflicted on the male psyche in different African cultural contexts. Alongside the above view, Simon and Preger-Simon (1991:306) consider the demeaning perception of male oppression as a pathetic reversal of desires. They assert that:

What men and boys lose through their oppression is not access to resources, as do most other oppressed groups, but access to a whole range of human qualities and choices. Little boys are tender, vulnerable, full of feelings and very expressive. They love to be close, connected and cuddly. Very early in their lives, these aspects of their nature become a liability. While boys are permitted to maintain and develop a sense of adventure, independence, and power, their gentler inclinations are quickly shamed and pummeled out of their repertoire. When boys show their vulnerability and tenderness to other little boys or to adults around them, they are regularly teased and humiliated and often beaten up or ostracized.

Chinua Achebe's remarks about Nwoye in his novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958) aptly capture the above view. Nwoye encapsulates an innocent male-child whose sensitive emotional qualities are hushed by cultural ideology—the type that deadens male drive for sympathy and emotion. This display of emotion has earned Nwoye several episodes of beating from his father, Okonkwo who thinks he behaves more like girls and women. In fact, Okonkwo has cautioned him severally to spend less time with women, and spend more time with boys and men—the reason he brought Ikemefuna as a masculine model to his supposedly lazy son. Okonkwo's ideology stems from the fundamental perception of gender as the source of conflict between male and female—the fact that spurs female dependence on the patriarchal culture. In addition, Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1969:33) notes that “patriarchal power is ubiquitous and that sexuality ideological indoctrination as much as economic equality is the site where male power is often exercised”. Achebe's portrayal of what Kolawole in *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997: 93) perceives as “a world of male heroism” makes the female gender subordinate to males—a cultural conviction that encourages girls and women to be docile, dependent, inferior and passive.

Though Helen Chukwuma (1989:3) asserts that the “handicap of the female is natal, just by being born a female child”, she has failed to recognize that the male gender is contemptuously denigrated if not living up to the expectation of the acceptable standard prescribed within their cultural contexts. From childhood, boys are conditioned to behave in a particular manner with mapped out tasks in society—responsibilities that give them deep sense of manliness wrapped in isolation. Specifically, they are trained to be hustlers, protectors, providers and soldiers—people who bore pains within their souls without any display of affection or empathy. All these are difficult circumstances that stimulate anxiety for the male gender.

Within African discourse, most writers focus on intricate issues that abhor female oppression, but plays down helplessly in silence on the acts of brutality that unleash oppression on the male gender—series of patterns that exploit their self-growth and psyche leading to spatial confinement, regimental roles, disillusionment or death. Notably, the undercurrent of male

oppression negates the patriarchal ideology which purely recognizes the male gender as the wielder of authority in the context of Africa's organizational structure. Currently, one must not deny the fact that most criticisms on literary works have inevitably had a bias in favour of the female gender, rather than discussing the domineering, abusive and radical roles they have played in doubling the crises of the male. The fact remains that the dogma enshrined in cultural ideology or popular mantra that the female is wrapped in docility and unquestioning acceptance to be seen and not heard—is susceptible to manipulation of African writers' concentration. This indeed becomes a disturbing trend which idolizes the ill-treatment of males at the hands of the female while writers fantasize about female liberation—a status so cynically expressed in African criticism by feminists. To give further depth to the above critical stance, one cannot deny the fact that the supposedly second-class status conferred on the female gender as a form of subjugation has culminated into a reversal of status with prejudices that championed the ill-treatment of males through feminist ideology and misogyny.

The present effort of this study on oppression revolves around the mistreatment of males across gender and social class. This form of mistreatment explores the nuances in the denial of rights that male personalities face daily as well as certain abusive or exploitative actions that obstruct their self-worth, self-growth, mental well-being and bodily wholeness. No doubt, most depictions by writers lack sufficient empathy, concern and literary exertion that create an aura of verisimilitude in relation to male sufferings. This is as a result of the feminists' critical ideologies which have occupied a large narrative space that leaves little or no room for emphasis on the state of male oppression in African cultural contexts. The current feminist agitation for female liberation and active participation in society is gradually blinding people's view on male gender's condition. The fact remains that the female gender finds it virtually impossible to avoid trampling on the sensitivities of the male gender—even when they claim ignorance of the harm they are causing. The most obvious aspect of oppression is that natural experiences have taken the place of written narration, with individuals unconstrained by the harsh reality stripping males of their fundamental rights—especially certain experiences that have reduced them to objects only useful for manipulation, suppression and confinement. This ideology assumes the dimensions of oppression and objectification of boys and men, the direct opposite of what the feminist movements has been working to eliminate in their conception of female oppression.

This study examines how the selected novelist has explored the dimensions of male oppression in his novel. Emmanuel Ifediata's *Slay Queen* (2019) is explored from the perspective of a male writer in order to examine various human rights violation and consequences on the male gender—both physical and psychological. The novel also identifies oppressive conditions that cause great physical and psychological anxiety to the male gender in different contexts.

Specifically, the selected novel has exposed certain images of oppression and subjugation—both physical and psychic violation of the male gender's rights of choice, freedom and expression. Hence, this paper focuses on the internalized oppressive conditions spurred by psychological images of inferiority which reduce the efforts of the male gender. The oppressive conditions of the male protagonists are replete with distorted psyche and bruised image—victims regulated by gender socialization processes. The selected author under study has universalized certain female and male-oriented approaches that expose the male gender to suffer different forms of oppression categorized into personal, social and economic. The study has adopted Marxist Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis as theoretical framework in explicating the issue of oppression in selected fictional texts.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Perspectives of the Study**

The focus of this paper is on male prejudice—a pattern of oppression. Therefore, the conceptual framework for this study hinges on Human rights and Oppression as basic concepts in analyzing male abuse in literary contexts.

#### **Human Rights**

Human rights as a concept is very suitable for this research. The discussion assumes the viewpoint that considers literary interpretation of abusive behaviour leading to violence or gender-based violence. A peculiar nature of human rights is hinged on the fact that the dignity of any individual is non-negotiable (Moyn 2014:56). According to Cruft (2019), human rights are rights that stipulates responsibilities on the basis of equality. In every context, human rights have become relevant as instruments for social change. This argument is given attention due to varied lending conditions, national and international development wrapped on oppression as reflected in colonialism, racism, slavery, apartheid, feminist struggles and other indigenous issues (Clapham 2007:50).

Basically speaking, human rights are ethical principles or norms. A deeper definition is pegged on “Human rights as norms that aspire to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal, and social abuses. Examples of human rights are the right to freedom of religion, the right to a fair trial when charged with a crime, the right not to be tortured, and the right to education” (*Standford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2019:1). Feinberg (1973) communicates a clearer perspective that human rights exist as shared conventions of human recognition of the distinctions between good and bad (evil) or the differences between right and wrong, respect and disrespect, obedience and disobedience to proper manner of behaviour. This also concerns people’s conduct or mental disposition about behaviours towards one another or a group towards another group.

The United Nations’ perception about human rights is not distinct from the attention given by scholars and legal procedures. The United Nations through the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* has consistently maintained that human rights thrive on the basis of justice, freedom and peace in different cultural contexts (1). Notably, the 1993 world conference in Vienna has a realistic approach on human rights which attempts to be binding on all cultures and countries. The Article 5 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* further maintains that all “human rights are universal, indivisible and interdependent and interrelated” to avoid excuses of oppression and repression of citizens. Following this declaration, the United Nations advocates for fair and equal treatment globally notwithstanding any religious, social, cultural, political and regional differences. Specifically, political, economic and cultural systems are mandated to promote and protect all fundamental human rights of freedom and life. One should expect that the philosophy of human rights interprets investigation about issues of existence, nature, universality, reason and legal position of human rights. A critical approach sees it as universal and inalienable moral societal norms that are justified. Deobbler (2006 :26) conceptualizes human rights as general principles that are universal, equal, non-discriminatory and inalienable in application. The above view does not nullify or eliminate the fact that the sanctity of people’s lives has been impinged upon and threatened on daily basis. The contemporary society has witnessed an increased form of human rights abuse which cannot be justified within any scope. In fact, a coherent attempt to rationalize the implication of abuse of rights grows more violence—circumstances which breed bodies of insecurities affecting everyone—both male and female.



## Oppression

Oppression as a concept has informed a sensibility that is encouraged by prejudice and power. This sensibility creates social status or systems that are arduous, unfair or cruel. From historical perspectives, it is important to assert that oppression results to denial and discrimination which exist within a given cultural milieu. It seems important to note that oppression results to the discrimination of an individual by another individual or an individual or groups of individual by another group. Oppression thrives in conformity which exposes the oppressed to stereotypical behaviour within a social or cultural group (Allport, 1954). Stereotype and oppression have a correlation which attempts to encourage distorted beliefs of superiority in dominant cultures (Cameron & Wycoff, 1998; Kleg, 1993). Oppression manifests in a state of affairs in which a person is hurting another in a relationship with an irrational sense of authority or entitlement (Watt, 1999). The prevalent sense of entitlement is usually ridiculous with an intent to manipulate emotion through frustration.

According to Fred J. Hanna, William B. Talley, and Mary H. Guindon (2000),

Oppression is defined and identified as the basis of a considerable range of psychopathology. An exploratory transcultural model of counseling based on oppression is introduced with the goal of serving both oppressed and oppressive clients. Perception, as perspicacity, is the key to this exploratory model. The authors suggest that oppressed persons generally possess a considerable degree of perception of their oppressors even though they may be unaware of it. Research from the literature on depressive realism is used to infer support. Counseling approaches to oppressed persons are introduced including a new approach to cognitive therapy and an emphasis on liberation rather than adjustment. Counseling approaches to oppressors are also discussed based on the rehabilitation of empathy and perception. (430)

We can see systems of oppression as patterns of denial that are deeply rooted in every culture. In a rapidly changing world, social consciousness on matters of oppression has specific levels such as individual level, institutional level and societal/cultural level. Oppression from a psychosocial point of view represents the dimension of abuse or certain mistreatment that causes psychological suffering of an acute nature or emotional pain that is alarming. The tragedy of oppression is that it exists within the domain of stereotype and hostile attitude – prejudice (Kleg, 1993; Robinson & Ginter, 1999a). But the infliction of both physical and emotional pain is simply perpetrated in circumstances where people do not adhere to philosophical view, norms or conventions that embrace addition or inclusion in the ruling or dominant group (Goldberg, 1990).

From a social perspective Prilleltensky and Gonick (1996) observe that oppression could be grasped as a concept to explore the influence of the social, political and the psychological contexts. Lord & Dufort (1996) perceive oppression as a phenomenon with intellectually deep consequences for mental health. In addition, Jacobs (1994) observes that oppression is the main source of all psychopathology—a mental or behavioural disorder. Fred J. Hanna et al assert that “the current multicultural movement acknowledges the existence of oppression but has seldom addressed it as a subject in itself in terms of its mechanisms, process and clinical approaches” (430). They further maintain that:

The population of oppressed persons includes far more than the actual victims of oppressive governments. They range from groups such as ethnic minorities; gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons; women; and persons with disabilities; to

victims of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, and at-risk children and adolescents. Oppressors also include a wide range of persons and institutions, which we attempt to show. They include, but are not limited to, physical and sexual abusers, batterers, as well as persons who fit the profiles of antisocial and narcissistic personality disorders and other categories of dysfunction in which harm is done to others. (430-431)

While agreeing on the perception of oppression, we must understand a useful pattern that oppression does not have a peculiar domain. There are dominant cultures that allow oppression to thrive in both minority and majority groups. The implication is that the assumption that minority groups is majorly crushed or held down by the majority is incorrect. The fact is that conflicts which reflect oppressive tendencies challenge physical, social and psychic well-being of individuals in different societies. Robinson & Ginter (1999b) projects a familiar view woven around cultural mind-set or the philosophy of a dominant group or minority group which has various disagreeing opinions on class, race or status. The implication is that the oppressed individual or group could be entangled in circumstances that castrate his/her power, status or valuable assets. This often results to adverse physical and severe conditions that could be life threatening (Miller, 1986). Basically, Freire (1970) underscores the fact that one major distinctive feature of the oppressed individuals or group is the “culture of silence”. He firmly believes that the oppressor operates within a dominant culture which controls or confers silence to the identity or role of the oppressed. Notably, the voice of the oppressed is suppressed by the oppressors which he or she must conform with dominant tendencies in the quest for identity which requires great burden that debase humanity. That the oppressors harp on the inferiority of the oppressed is no longer a news. This growing awareness has carved oppression into modes and types—oppression by coercion (intimidation) and deprivation (manipulation). These two modalities cause both physical and psychological pains. They are designed to perpetually hold the victims on the ground with illusions of identity and self-image in the face of stereotype. Basically, distorted beliefs are dominantly encouraged with no positive physical or psychological transformation.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research has employed different theoretical framework to explore the issue of male oppression in selected fictional texts. The study has adopted Marxist Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis as theoretical framework.

### **Marxist Critical Theory**

This theory throws some light on the nature or patterns of oppression which indicate that social groupings and economic association or conditions play vital roles in encouraging oppression within a given context. Marxist Critical theory projects a critical consciousness through an approach interpreted as “Conscientization”—a social concept that centers on interpreting and comprehending a given cultural context through exposure and the identification of political and social impediments borne of self-contradiction. Orji-Mba (2013:181) observes that:

Marxist literature exposes social contradictions in society, and recommends violent revolution as the only corrective measure. Marxism is tied to the sociological theory in that the former is an aspect of the later. Sociological criticism is based on the idea that social contexts serve as the material with which literary works are constructed. It studies the relationship between a literary work and the social institutions that it reflects. And it is this social institutions and realities that Marxism examines.

Basically, the theory asserts that oppression promotes control by means of force or manipulation which is not often limited to the minority group, but clearly evident in varied contexts that are more complex in nature. What is basically at stake is the position of Marxist criticism which discusses the issues of social status, economic condition and power association within a given social or cultural context. Notably, all these issues are very important in Marxist criticism since they aid in the interpretation of social conditions visible in a given fictional text. Onoge (2009:471) attempts a clearer perspective which states that “Marxist criticism is necessarily sociological. This sociological nature is important because it distinguishes it from all other types of literary criticism. However, its sociology is rooted in the materialist understanding of cultural consciousness”. In Marxist analysis of literature, a sentimental outburst recurs in the interpretation of class struggle representing any political or social conditions. Precisely, an interpretation of social values, norms and class issues is challenge within literary perspectives by Marxist literary critics. To give a cogent assessment, one must agree that:

Marxist’s critics examine literature from the point of view of dominant elites and the rich. They consider how the dominant elites exploit subordinate groups and the bourgeois suppress the working class. The Marxist’s critics see how literature can be used to promote some social and economic revolution, consciousness and awareness and a radical transformation of the society to bring equilibrium and bridge the gaps in social class systems. (Agyekum 2007:129)

Notably, Marxism reflects determinism—a pattern of thought which stresses that individuals are the product of their environment—both economic, social and cultural. No wonder Marx and Engels have viewed “morality, religion and philosophy as phantoms formed in the brains of men— everything that is determined by the nature of the economic base, known as economic determinism” (Krishnaswamy et al. 2005: 97). Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher and Friedrich Engels (1828-1859), a German social scientist are the proponents of the theory of Marxism—a theory first projected as communism in their 1848 Communist Manifesto. Krishnaswamy, N., Varghese, John and Mishra, Sunita (2005: 97) further observe that:

The basic tenets of Marxism can be summarized as follows in the words of Marx himself: the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their living but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness....According to Marx, all mental/ideal systems are the products of social and economic existence. Marxism is a materialistic philosophy that tries to explain our living in terms of concrete and observable facts and not in terms of an idealistic philosophy that assumes the existence of a world beyond the physical world around us. Marx believed that only the material interests of the dominant social class determine our existence, be it the legal, economic or cultural order of patriarchal phase of human history. Marxism views history as a class struggle and progress as a process through the struggle for power among different social classes.

No doubt, human needs are psychological, and the quest for existence within social structures is central to man. Man basically explores relation to the external world. This is a materialist perspective on production, distribution and consumption with deep, hidden or covert structures.

### **Psychoanalysis**

The approach of this study is unique because it examines human personality in the face of oppression. It is natural therefore to question the implications of oppression as a phenomenon



with mental health consequences. It is significant to note that in truth, oppression is perceived as the primary nexus of psychopathology—a cruel pattern which hurts the oppressed without traces of diseases, poor health or inherited characteristics from DNA (Jacobs 1994). Different cultures and groups recognize the existence of male oppression, but has scarcely perceived it as an issue of distinct control of power which must be approached with clinical insights. According to Hanna et al (2000:432) who cited Jacobs (1994):

Oppression is forcing something that is undesirable or harmful on a person or group; depriving a person or group of something that is needed, wanted, or helpful; or both. To be oppressive, it must also threaten or ruin a person’s mental or physical health, well-being, or coping ability. From a global perspective, oppression, either by force or deprivation, is clearly a major source of psychological problems and issues, in general, and leads to depression, anxiety, and some personality disorders.

On the whole however, we find that psychoanalysis is very suitable for the interpretation of experiences that cause emotional disorders. This brings to mind our perception of psychoanalysis as an observed therapy and “theory of the human mind” (Eagleton 137). From psychoanalytical perspective, the psyche of the oppressed operates at different levels called models: the ‘id’—the unconscious impulsive component of an oppressed personality; the ‘superego’—the model of the mind that operates as a self-critical conscience which reflects the social standard of a given society and the ‘ego’ which wraps the oppressed self with a sense of self-conceit or conduct. The premises of this research captures Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical approach which stipulates that human lives are controlled and affected by conscious and unconscious desires which supports Karl Marx’s proposition that individuals are product of their economy and society.

A writer who captures an oppressed mind in fictional texts should understand psychoanalysis as a theory of how the mind works as well as a modality for caring for the oppressed with psychological injury. As method within the area of psychotherapy, psychoanalysis finds connection between an oppressed victim’s unconscious mental processes and the external factors. This knowledge on psychoanalysis has been found in the early 1890s by the Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud and firstly explored in Freud’s work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899)—a work that had originally been written in French with the title, *Die Traum deu tung*” (1896) (Gay 3-4). It must be noted that psychoanalysis works within a psychological framework that could be recognized as major concepts for interpreting literary texts. The concepts of psychoanalysis as stipulated by Sigmund Freud are wrapped in the crisis of human personality and relationships such as emotional/ psychological injury termed ‘trauma’, the involuntary rejection from consciousness of painful impulses or memories known as ‘repression’, the condition of lacking awareness of situations called the ‘unconscious’, directing an impulse towards a socially constructive valued end known as ‘sublimation’, the sexual and death drives, the feeling of self-importance known as ‘ego’ and the unconscious fantasy which are spurred by socio-political and economic conditions (Fromm 12-13). In addition, Terry Eagleton (2008:131) upholds the above view on psychoanalysis. He further observes that:

‘The motive of human society is in the last resort an economic’. It was Freud, not Karl Marx, who made this statement, in his *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. What has dominated human history to date is the need to labour; and for Freud that harsh necessity means that we must repress some of our tendencies to pleasure and gratification. If we were not called upon to work

in order to survive, we might simply lie around all day doing nothing. Every human being has to undergo this repression of what Freud named the ‘pleasure principle’ by the ‘reality principle’, but for some, and arguably for whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill. We are sometimes willing to forgo gratification to a heroic extent, but usually in the canny trust that by deferring an immediate pleasure we will recoup it in the end, perhaps in richer form. We are prepared to put up with repression as long as we see that there is something in it for us; if too much is demanded from us, however, we are likely to fall sick. This form of sickness is known as neurosis—this is wrapped around what causes our unhappiness.

In a work of this nature, the extreme poles of the selected theories and approaches need to be stated clearly for appropriate interpretation of experiences. By nature of evidence and interest, Marx explored the implications of materialist need in terms of social classes, nature of politics and social relations, while Freud has explored the consequences of materialist need as a mental process—a psychic pattern of influence on life (Eagleton 2008:132).

### **Social Prejudice and Male Portraiture: Unmasking Servitude and Exploitation in Ifediata’s *Slay Queen***

In the context of African literature, Masculinity has always been associated with power and courage which engage males in cultural and social activities that are already prescribed. The inalienable truth is that males are affected by emotion, class, labour productive needs and mainstream ideologies which “interlock them in the systems of economic, social and sexual exploitation within the same patriarchal culture” that gives them so much prominence (Bammer, 1982:153). Obviously, the male protagonists’ conditions in Emmanuel Ifediata’s *Slay Queen* are largely pathetic. This research rather than take a feminist turn like other critics have done, has taken a reasonable pattern to discuss a global perspective of male oppression with discernable threats to mental health and coping ability. The fact remains that within the socio-political contexts that male protagonists are confined in the selected texts, there seems to be a pattern of tragedy in their lives—a vigorous fatality that transcends their ability to comprehend or to arrest the pre-ordained course of oppressive events (Irele, 1967: 24).

Emmanuel Ifediata’s *Slay Queen* is a reflection of the contemporary Nigerian socio-economic pattern replete with oppression which basically affects the male gender with repressive tendencies cloned in silence. Within the context of this research, oppression is explored as a paradigm for all kinds of exploitation, manipulation, intimidation, abuse, violence and repression of desires of the male protagonists in the selected fictional texts. Notably, most societies in West African fiction are usually depicted as class-based, corrupt—societies thriving in wrong values (Nwahunanya 1990:17). The ‘Preface’ of Emmanuel Ifediata’s *Slay Queen* (2019: vii) captures a societal predatory behaviour in two parts:

That which has its bearing on historical materialism and class struggle. The first part ends with the unfortunate death of the protagonist. The second part of the story continues without the protagonist but the death of the protagonist in the first part ploughs the ground for the resolution of the conflict that claims his life. After the protagonist’s death, four extra chapters only mention the protagonist. Everything about the protagonist ends as soon as he dies while the story moves on without him.

Uche, the male protagonist of *Slay Queen* is a totally uneducated Keke driver, an emasculated ordinary young man who has been excluded from positive change through a manifestation of social injustice that has demeaned, denigrated and deformed him. In this novel, the male protagonist lacks the daring and courageous attributes that the male gender is imbued with in most African novels.

In the novel, *Oka* is a city that has established a stereotypical pattern that divides individuals into different classes—poor/rich, ugly/beautiful, primitive/civilized. In the beginning of the novel, the authorial voice affirms the position of squalor in which the male protagonist is entangled naturally. In *Slay Queen* (2019: 2), we see a glaring description:

Uche, a dark, flat-nosed, youth of twenty-six lived by himself in a small at the floor of an old-looking, unpainted two-storeyed building which stood like a relic in the heart of a broken-down street at a very remote part of Oka town. When he was seventeen, his father had slipped and fallen to his death from a palm tree, leaving behind for him only a mud house with thatched roof, two goats and five jars of palm wine as inheritance. (2)

Within the Oka city, class discrimination is deeply ingrained—a social problem that has eaten deep into the social circle. Stereotype and discrimination are constitutive elements in social relationships based on perceived differences between individuals from different social and cultural backgrounds. In the context of the novel, Uche, the male protagonist falls within the category of people that have been psychologically oppressed and marginalized. In the novel, the readers perceive an authorial voice which exposes the tradition of human rights abuse, freedom of existence, fairness and equality which haunts the ego of the male protagonist with deep psychological consequence that has encouraged disassociation and continuous depression. In *Slay Queen* (2019: 3),

Other drivers who plied the same route as him on a daily basis; who didn't seem to like him, would taunt him to anger by calling him *Nwa Abakeleke*, a discriminatory remark which stood for a bushman. The reality of being held in low esteem by indigenes of the town subdued Uche and depressed him even more. For the first in his life, that feeling of being something wrong began to creep up in him. He had a lot of lone time and spent most of it in loud, dark silence, thinking about the world and what it had cost him and kept denying him. The emptiness he felt inside him at such painful moment was quite deep and it shrunk his soul because it made his heart—which throbbed painfully—cold and wanting.

In the novel, we perceive a glaring depiction that infers great value to individuals from certain Igbo cultural contexts, while less value is accorded to individuals of certain primitive locations too insignificant for the approval of many within a booming city like *Oka*. The above demeaning statements about Uche is obviously discriminative—it ultimately creates social construction that values a category of people, but wraps other perceived groups in unacceptability that validates superiority over inferiority in a society that encourages endless class struggles. Notably, stereotyping is a pattern with psychological and emotional implications. Uche's experiences are based on social construct which denies him fair and equal treatment. Ifediata has exposed social construct as an oppressive tool capable of promoting psychological violence. As depicted in the novel, Uche is wrapped in a pattern of *Oedipal guilt* which has denied him a complete emotional freedom from social construct. This Oedipal guilt in Freudian theory, finds a subtle interpretation of complex emotions which arouses an

unconscious desire for the protagonist to embrace melancholy amid the frustration of class discrimination and struggle. Notably, *Oedipus guilt* is produced from *Oedipus complex* which Freud calls the “nucleus of the neuroses” (Eagleton 2008:138). Eagleton (2008:137-8) further observes that:

There is a relation between the kind of neurosis a patient displays and the point in the pre-Oedipal stage at which his or her psychical development becomes arrested or fixated. The aim of psychoanalysis is to uncover the hidden causes of the neurosis in order to relieve the patient of his or her conflicts, so dissolving the distressing symptoms.

It is significant to note that in the scope of psychoanalysis, any victim of oppression is a patient that needs to be cured or relieved of different levels of neurosis. Eagleton explains that internal conflict results to what we refer to as *neurosis*— what Freud refers to as ‘parapraxes’, unaccountable slips of tongue, failures of memory, bunglings, misreadings and mislayings which can be traced to unconscious wishes and intentions (2008:137). Uchenna’s neurosis stems from *bungling*—an act of incompetence or ineptitude spurred by a sense of inferiority that fixated his ego or individual identity within his familial and social networks.

For Uche, hate for the oppressive stereotype represses his *superego* aggression—the part of his mind with self-critical conscience that reflects on certain social standards that have impinged on his rights of existence and freedom of association. We should understand that Uchenna’s psychic wholeness is affected by stereotype—a hurtful pattern that has become an inward tragedy that militates against his pleasure principles. Uche thus emerges from the Oedipal process as a split subject, torn precariously between conscious and unconscious. The fact remains that his awareness of the oppressive stereotype has created a repressive altar that torments his spirit pulling him into darker part of himself in which the unconscious haunts him. According to *Slay Queen* (2019: 4),

Whenever he was alone in his nearly empty room, the only thing which kept him company was his sad, murky thoughts. The thoughts of gloom and misery, thoughts which walked into his distressed mind to remind him that he was very far from getting rich. At such times, all he could do was stare into the empty space which was his room and fling his head this way and that. His mattress was very old and flat and he wasn’t the only one who was making use of it. He shared the old, flat mattress with bed bugs but in order to keep them firm from biting into his skin, he managed to buy a fairly used bed cloth with which he covered the disgraceful antiquity of the foam.

It is very discouraging to find that negative social behaviour causes anxiety and melancholy which in turn stifle positive growth in an individual. In fact, repressive measures borne of love for loneliness takes over Uche’s life. Uche’s repression is not merely borne of stereotype; it is fueled by a psychological abuse caused by years of servitude without adequate reward from his master—the owner of the *Keke* he drove for eight years without adequate reward. *Slay Queen* (2019: 4),

It happened that after eight years of dutiful service to his master, he was settled with an old tricycle which he used to generate a lot of money for his master. When he left his master’s employ, he had moved into the drab, disused and broken down apartment with the flat mattress which he took from his master’s house, two rusty spoons, two plates, a worn-out pair of sandals, two patched trousers and a few number of old shirts which were all contained in a nylon bag.

Uche's plight exposes intra gender oppression—an unfair treatment of domestic servants during and after long years of servitude. Uche's master is a male from Abakeleke “who came back from the city in a jeep and said he would like Uche to join him in the city so that Uche could learn and start his own business” (*Slay Queen* 2019: 2). That a man could exploit a fellow man whom he promised emancipation from poverty after the death of his father is indeed psychologically oppressive. “of course, a fellow transporter like him nicknamed Rudeboy who dropped out from senior secondary school to start driving *Keke* had told him that he was naïve and foolish and could never make money if he continued giving his master almost all of it” (*Slay Queen* 2019: 3).

From Uche's perspective, we see poverty as a tool of subjugation which revolts against his will to rise above his circumstances. The implication is that his oppressive *superego* becomes a revengeful aggressor that turns into self-abuse with constant deep reflection. Uche definitely lacks the inner will to free himself from all the constraints put on his life by unrewarding and manipulative servitude. Here again, the representation of male character is designed to expose the negative conceptualized pattern of intra gender oppression—an aspect of reality that pushes male servants backward without any validity of growth. Intra gender oppression also extends to lack of brotherhood in the novel—a term that should promote friendship borne out of gender connection among male characters, but we see friendship betrayal fueled by glimpses of stereotype. “other drivers who plied the same route as Uche on a daily basis; who didn't seem to like him, would taunt him to anger by calling him *Nwa Abakeleke*, a discriminatory remark which stood for bushman” (*Slay Queen* 2019: 3). From the above quotation, it is clear that Freud's concept of Oedipus plays out effectively in the novel. There is obviously lack of male bonding. Uche has been emotionally and physically enthralled by oppressive figureheads—those who control territorial powers such as his Abakeleke master and other drivers.

The inter-play of stereotype and lack of brotherhood weakens Uche beyond his capabilities with severe emotional threat that yearns for pleasure principle—love borne out of societal acceptance.

Similarly, the plot of *Slay Queen* is replete with glimpses of stereotype, manipulation and friendship betrayal. The source of Uche's emotional abuse is woven around inter gender and intra gender. The reality of being held in low self-esteem by indigenes of Oka town has a subduing and depressing effect on Uche. In the reality of his situation, he is confronted with forces drawing him to self-love until his pleasure principle got him entrapped in an oppressive love for a young lady, Ada.

Uche's experiences indeed form the structural center of *Slay Queen*. In quest for psychological liberation, he embraces a relationship to pick a new identity. This new found love is an escape from patriarchal oppressive attitudes that threaten his rights of existence. The authorial voice comments on Uche's consciousness to self-discovery—a new pattern of life that would help erase his melancholic feelings.

Of all emotions that exist on the human mind, love is the strongest. Of all things, it was this slowest form of suicide that captivated Uche's young and inexperienced heart and in the darkness of his lonely desire, made him yearn earnestly for that beautiful Igbo lady whom he had no clue whether she felt the same way towards him or not. (*Slay Queen* 2019: 5)



Uche’s new found love is a form of self-assertion with narcissistic tendencies— that which propel his self-actualization—a male consciousness that negates familial bond and connections. Uche exhibits high level of dependence on Ada’s love—a decision that eventually leads to his death. According to the narrator:

Ever since he met the young lady, he had not been himself. She was always on his mind and he couldn’t stop thinking about her. The thought of her has refused to walk away from his head. His world was beginning to revolve around her, and each day he didn’t hear from her, he didn’t feel good. He felt as if there was something missing in this life of emptiness in him that needed to be filled. This void in his heart yearned to be filled up, this feeling yearned to be accepted. It was a desperate kind of obsessive feeling. (*Slay Queen* 2019: 7)

It is important to note that Ada’s attachment to Uche is a manipulative means of defrauding him of his hard-earned money—a catalyst that has fueled intra-gender oppression. In the novel, Ada’s love for Uche is wrapped in deceit. This is evident in her confession to her mother:

“Hummm. Mummy, no o. God forbid. He said he wants to marry me but I can’t accept him. He is just a *Keke* boy that lives in one room. Mummy, do you know that there is no property in his room yet he wants to train me in school?” Ada revealed to her mother. Hummm.... Mummy, I’ll just play along so that he will train me in school. I am not going to marry him.... I can’t marry someone at his level”. (*Slay Queen* 2019: 33)

Ada’s confession has generated a psychological controversy—one that makes readers to identify hypocrisy and insensitivity deeply ingrained in intergender relationships. Unarguably, Ada’s natural predispositions to Uche’s personality projects the notion of objectification—an unfair treatment that is oppressively based on stereotype and discrimination. According to Ada, “...that boy is a *keke* boy o. I don’t even know if the *keke* he is driving belongs to him. Another thing is that he did not go to the university and he is from Abakaleke” (*Slay Queen* 2019: 32). In the context of Marxist Critical theory, we can interpret Ada’s exploitative pattern of life to be based on class and economic relationship. This is what we refer to as gendered domination—a clear representation of how the female gender manipulate the psyche of the male gender for economic gain.

Notably, Ada and Uche belong to the same social categorization—people of poor background whose parents are constantly in need of money. Ada’s confesses: “my parents don’t have money to pay my school fees and train me in school” (*Slay Queen* 2019:28). However, Ada’s stance as a young beautiful female from a booming city— *Oka* gives her the impunity to relegate Uche to the background—a pattern of thought that abhors primitiveness based on stereotype of places. This is indeed a generalized oppression which imbues females with manipulative powers to exploit vulnerable males for economic gains. Basically, the role of Uche is carved under manipulative servitude—to provide financial support, both physical and psychological to Ada’s family at the expense of his poor family at Abakeleke that wallow in abject poverty. The authorial voice comments that:

Uche was completely obsessed with Ada. He was neither concerned about his poor mother’s health nor the welfare of his younger sisters in the village. All he cared about was Ada. Even when his mother was receiving treatment at the herbalist’s, he was not following up with phone calls to know if his mother was responding to medical treatment. (*Slay Queen* 2019:28)

Ada's manipulation is a universalized gendered behaviour considered to be typical with females of poor economic background—a kind of economic struggle that encourages exploitation within the proletariat domain. In fact, Uche has continued paying Ada's school fees believing that he would marry until she spilled the words "I can't marry you" (*Slay Queen* 2019:59) with so much disgust after Uche has paid her fees to her graduation level. Ada's feminist goal is to claim the right of self-definition while denying another the right for self-gratification. As a radical feminist, Ada becomes self-assertive in her decision not to marry Uche. Her decision is borne of male otherness that negates her economic development. But to Uche, Ada's rejection of his proposal is psychologically depressing—an oppressive marginalization caused by discontentment. The narrator comments that "Uche broke down in hot, scalding tears like the typical whimpering sissy he was" (*Slay Queen* 2019:59).

Following the narrator's thoughts, we understand the chaotic state of mind that has dethroned Uche's will to live. His narcissistic tendencies and love for Ada have caused him a lot. In bitterness, he confesses to Ada: "there's no amount of money that can compensate me for the sacrifices I made for you. I chose you over my sister and it caused her death. I lost my sister because of you. If I didn't give you money, I would have saved her life with the money I gave you" (*Slay Queen* 2019:64). No doubt, Uche's life is encumbered by many problems—the need to be accepted, his psychological insecurity, economic struggles, family needs and others. All these are harsh necessities that he repressed to acquire pleasure and self-gratification in order to survive. No doubt, Uche has neglected his family's need to gain his pleasure principle. According to Freud:

Every human being has to undergo this repression which is named the 'pleasure principle' by the 'reality principle', but for some of us, and arguably for the whole societies, the repression may become excessive and make us ill. We are sometimes willing to forgo gratification to a heroic extent, but usually in the canny trust that by deferring an immediate pleasure we will recoup it in the end, perhaps richer. We are prepared to put up with repression as long as we see that there is something in it for us; if too much is demanded from us, however, we are likely to fall sick, this form of sickness is known as neurosis. (Eagleton 2008:132)

Following Freud's train of thought, we must understand that Ada's rejection of Uche's proposal has caused an emotional sickness—the kind that is very tormenting. According to the narrator:

Depression nearly killed Uche. It happened after his fall-out with Ada, Uche was psychologically traumatized. The psychological devastation affected him to the extent that he became resentful, withdrawn, unwittingly gloomy and very sombre. He stopped driving for a few days and solitarily confined himself in his room without food and water. When his friends did not see him at the park for those few days, they began to ask after him. Ogazi offered to pay him a visit. That fateful evening when Ogazi drove down to the old, disused building where Uche lived. He knocked again and again but Uche didn't want to answers the door. With his full body weight, he charged at the door and forced it open. Lo and behold, to his greatest surprise, Uche had tied a noose around his neck and was about to jump off from the stool on which he stood. (*Slay Queen* 2019:68-69)

Uche's concept of self-assertion is captured in his dramatic display of suicide attempt. His internal struggle is a combination of oppression based on class and female exploitation. In fact,

his traumatic mind emphasizes freedom in its totality from female manipulative domination and oppression. In a bid to become manly through the advice of his friend Ogazi, Uche decides to take up a revolutionary stance towards self-assertion of rights. He has rejected lamentation, silence, inaction, blame and scapegoating to interrogate the Ada's degradation. His status does not improve in any way; neither does his inferiority gets erased for loving her. To Uche, Ada has left her psychologically damaged, emotionally and physically bankrupt. Uche's self-assertive quest propels him to demand compensation for training Ada in the university for years without reward. Not to remain on the floor, Uche threatens facing Ada and her parents in front of their old bungalow: "I have come to collect my money. Two million naira. Please give it to me let me go because, I'm not going to leave here without that money" (*Slay Queen* 2019:72). Dehumanizing patriarchal ideology surfaced in the reaction Ada's father has displayed the moment Uche demanded for compensation. It seems very nonsensical to promote oppressive mode based on stereotype which does not embrace peace. He simply lacks the spirit of male bonding—a signal to brotherhood which comprehends the suppressive and oppressive mode that Uche has been subjected. It is painfully revealing that in the face of pain, he verbally abused Uche with a derogatory expression: "*Bia nwa Abakeleke a, I na-apu ara? Are you made? How dare you carry a fight into my compound? Are you not Afraid? Now get out from this place, will you?*" (*Slay Queen* 2019:72)

Ada's father's threat does not stop there. He re-conceptualizes his ideology of negotiation to keep Uche away from his daughter without bargaining and negotiation. He has the effrontery to hire tugs to torture Uche. He warns: "don't kill him but make sure a dead person is better than him by the time you're through with him" (*Slay Queen* 2019:74). This undeserving treatment is horrifying because Uche died from torture without resisting oppression. The dramatic silencing of Uche through thuggery from a fellow man—a person old enough to be his father is very disturbing. In fact, the authorial has preoccupied the readers' thoughts with stereotype, intimidation and thuggery as patterns of patriarchal oppression of the male gender. This unceremonious death and killing of Uche is an attempt to finding a suitable rich husband for his daughter.

### Conclusion

The African male struggle against oppression remains tedious and mostly unnoticed due to certain feminist issues that project the female gender as the most vulnerable gender with disadvantaged position, but the fact remains that the male gender faces different challenges that affect them negatively—with physical, emotional and psychological consequences. Emmanuel Ifediata's *Slay Queen* (2019) has exposed certain themes that infiltrate male gender's psychological dispositions in the face of oppression such as stereotype, discrimination, verbal abuse, exploitation and manipulation. Ifediata's narration informs readers that oppression has different domains which could be inter gender-based and intra gender-based.

All these thematic preoccupations are interpreted through *Conscientization* based on Marxist Critical theory which gears towards critical social consciousness—a social concept that aids in comprehending social contradictions in our contemporary world. Although conscientization gears towards exposing oppressive orientation against the male, this research finds out through the interpretation of Freud's psychoanalysis that oppression is also traumatic to the male gender with physical, emotional and mental consequences.

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