

Gender Inequality and Domestic Conflict: A Critical Reflection on Clark's "The Wives Revolt" and Ubesie's "Ụwa Ntughari"

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Abstract

Gender inequality as a reflection of patriarchy is a common phenomenon in Africa. This study examines gender disparity in African literature written by men with a view to delineating the bases of gender inequality, the effects and the reaction by the victimized women. The study is guided by Galtung's (1969) theory of Structural Violence. Out of a number of literary works on gender, J.P. Clarke's *The wives revolt* (drama in English) and T. Ubesie's *Ụwa Ntughari* (poem in Igbo) were purposively selected, based on their thematic concern on gender inequality in the family. The result shows that, in both texts, the basis of gender inequality and all the attendant issues of marginalization and oppression are age-old traditional beliefs and axioms held as given and ordained. The effects of gender inequality were seen in both texts as injustice and poor perception of women by men. In *The Wives Revolt*, the women reacted to their financial deprivation, and social exclusion by physically staging a protest in the town, whereas in *Ụwa Ntughari*, the poet highlights the women's resistance of a system that traumatizes and downgrades them. In both texts, it is subtly underlined that the women have finally found their voices of dissent and are verbally combating their captors, after years of silence and repression. A point of departure in the two texts is that, in *The Wives Revolt*, the men finally realize their error and willy-nilly resolve the differences with women, but in *Ụwa Ntughari*, the poet would cede power to women after fulfilling certain conditions based on a reversal of gender roles that is not culturally practicable and realistic. Notably, the two texts downplayed the domestic roles played by women in society, which impels this study to advocate for a gender relationship based on complementarity and mutual deference and homage. This position is anchored on the understanding that, in the absence of a balanced and symmetrical power structure in the family and society, conflict will continue to dominate domestic discourse.

Keywords: Gender inequality, domestic conflict, patriarchy, J.P. Clarke, T. Ubesie

Introduction

Gender inequality is a subject of concern among organizations, societies, non-governmental agencies and peoples all over the world. The concern stems from the lopsided perception of gender, whereby one is seen to be of a higher status than the other. Reflected in practice, the masculine gender is accorded more status than the feminine gender in most societies across the world as a result of physical attributes. While males appear naturally predestined for adventurous events, females appear naturally disposed to domestic activities. Precisely, for reasons of morphology, males are seen to be stronger than females, and for that reason are required to engage in more physically tasking roles than females. In patriarchal societies in Africa, gender inequality is the norm; in traditional times, males are the ones that hunt for food and game in the jungle, and engage in difficult tasks such as splitting wood, harvesting crops such as yam, fetching fodder for domestic animals, cutting of grass, etc., while women engage in domestic chores that are considered less tasking such as fetching water, cooking, washing clothes and plates, sweeping the compound and general housekeeping. In some rare cases, it is actually termed a taboo in some African societies including Igbo for women to engage in certain masculine tasks such as climbing of tree and butchering an animal due to their delicate feminine features. While this consideration seems to justify gender inequality, it does not explain why women are denied certain basic rights simply on account of their gender. Such rights include, but not limited to freedom to participate and make input during meetings in the community.

In contemporary times, this perception and designation of roles are no longer as strict as they were. No thanks to technology and western civilization, nowadays the erstwhile roles of males and females are mixed. Aided by washing machine, long brushes, cookers and refrigerators, men have become part of the domestic front, as they wash, sweep, cook and preserve food, as much as the women. Outdoors also, women have also infiltrated the workplace, engaging in jobs that were traditionally the exclusive preserve of men such as truck/bus driving, welding, vulcanizing, etc. However, the fact remains that, men who engage in domestic acts do so with the understanding that they are merely assisting their wives and such men are in the minority. A proof that such condescension is not acceptable is that such men are mocked and taunted and derogatorily termed effeminate. Conversely, a majority of women who earn money for the family do so with the understanding that they are merely assisting their spouses, and while such women are eulogized, their men are pilloried. This is to say that, although gender roles still subsist in the mind and consciousness of people in many societies, some people are rethinking and reconsidering their positions.

A prominent area in life where gender inequality is so pervasive is in spousal relationship; in both times of yore and present times, husbands are believed to be the heads of the family while wives are seen as helpers or supporters. As head, the husband is the one expected to take decisions on most, if not all matters in the home. The wife is not expected to, on her own, do anything without the husband's approval and consent. This fact is aptly captured by an Igbo maxim *ebe aka ruru nwaanyi ka ona-ekobe di ya* "Where a woman's hand reaches is where she places on her husband" implying that the husband towers far above the wife in status, and the wife is limited by her auxiliary and subordinate position. In traditional period, women did not resist this subsidiary role as they were trained to believe that it was given and ordained by God. But in the contemporary period, women are not only inquiring into the rationale for the disparity, they are challenging and resisting the status quo. These modern wives represent mainly those who have received exposure through western education; other women are those who have been economically empowered, while the rest are poor, uneducated women who have received enlightenment from the informed ones. The dissenting disposition of the nascent/emergent wife indicates that the average African family is no longer the same. Most homes are riddled by conflict; at the root of this conflict is power relations demonstrated in the quest for control of the home. The men want to continue to exert power as it were, while the women want either to wrest it or to balance the ratio. This tensed condition is so pervasive that it has led to the collapse of many marriages and the courts are replete with too many divorce cases that are based on irreconcilable differences between spouses.

This situation has become the norm so much that it has reflected in literature; quite a number of writers have paid attention to unequal gender relations in the home to show the effect in the family and society. On the basis of the foregoing, this study examines gender inequality in the family from the perspective of J.P Clarke's *The Wife's revolt* and Tony Ubesie's *Uwa Ntughari*. This is with a view to delineating the bases and effects of gender inequality as presented by the authors.

Conceptualizing Gender and Gender Inequality

In the first place, gender has been used to designate the social features allocated to the biological sexes. Pilcher and Wheelehan (2004:56) are of the view that gender is used as an analytical category to make a distinction between biological sex differences and the way these are used to inform behaviors and competencies, which are then categorized as either "masculine" or "feminine". In corroboration, Kwatsha, (2009) defines gender as the socially defined capacities and attributes assigned to persons on the basis of sexual characteristics, and these gender attributions form the basis for understanding other elements of gender such as gender roles (behaving like a female or male) and gender identity (feeling like a female or male). Throwing more light on the concept, Allanana (2013) aver that gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women rightly captured in gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household, all which are socially, historically and culturally formulated and have nothing to do with biological differences. In addition, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) explains that gender is so thoroughly embedded in social institutions, social beliefs, community actions, and people's desires, that it appears to society as completely natural or given.

Gender inequality is therefore the placement of one sex over another on the basis of their socially designated roles. In concrete terms, it is discrimination based on sex which privileges or prioritizes one sex over another. Okebukola (2018) opines that gender imbalance or gender inequality, are labels used to delineate the practice of favouring and giving preferential treatment to males at the expense of their female counterparts. Precisely, it means the placement of the male sex over the female sex, implying that the man is superior or more important than the women. In other words, the society deliberately discriminates against women, not because of their intrinsic or extrinsic capacities, but simply on account of their sex. Furthering this stance on discrimination, Allanana (2013: 116) avers that gender inequality "is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females". In using these socio-cultural attributions to limit women, the men are made and seen to be dominant in every aspect of society, especially the family. According to Kwatsha, (2009) Gender inequality is inextricably connected to the relationship of power between the sexes, as males dominate women and while women are regarded as incomplete, emotionally dependent, and physically mutilated men are seen as powerful and designed to be dominant. In the view of (Amiriheobu, and Owunari, 2019) Gender inequality is viewed as the most pervasive form of inequality all over the world and it is also seen as a critical human right issue.

It has been suggested that an important reason or underlying factor for this lopsided gender structure is patriarchy. Pilcher and Wheelehan (2004:93) opine that patriarchy literally means "rule by the male head of a social unit" (a family or tribe). Thus, it is the male folk who design the rules and customs that promote the male and degrade the female. Allanana (2013) define patriarchy as a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions. In affirmation, Okpe, (2005) views patriarchy as a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or

controlled and dominated by men. He adds that in feminist discourse, the idea of patriarchy often permeates all the social mechanisms that reproduce and exert male dominance. In essence, patriarchy is all about male rule, control, authority, power and dominance in every facet of community life, social, cultural, political, etc. Thus, where the men rule, the women are the ruled, where men control, the women are the controlled, where men dominate, the women are the dominated. To evaluate the extent of this system of social stratification, Abubakir et al, (2019) opine that the pervasiveness and the persistence of gender inequality, reflected in the dominance of the men over the women is particularly evident in patriarchal societies.

This socially induced asymmetry in the status of men and women in the society has been used to limit women and hinder their natural capacities. Emmakhu (2013) opines that gender inequality or discrimination has not helped women as it has resulted in very devastating social, economic and health consequences on women across many countries in the world where they have been intensely marginalized and relegated to the background. It is for this reason that Article 1 of the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) defined the notion of “gender discrimination” as any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of man and woman, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field. This view underlines the degree of limitation experienced by women in society, the holistic contexts of limitation and the need for their emancipation.

As a result of the adverse effects of gender inequality on women, several organizations and groups using certain instruments have risen to advocate for the abrogation of the systems that discriminate against women. Some of these instruments are as follows: African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights (1986), Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict (1974); Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (2000), etc. (in Emakhu, 2013) Among these legal frameworks, there is a consensus that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights without any distinction of any kind, including distinction with regards to sex. They acknowledge the fact that discrimination against women is not in consonance with human dignity, the welfare of the family and society. They also recognize that discrimination against women negates women’s participation with men on equal terms, in the social, political, economic and cultural life of communities, in addition to being a hindrance to the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity (Emakhu, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

This research will be guided by the theory of Structural Violence propounded by Johan Galtung (1969). Johan Galtung, a professor in conflict and peace studies founded the International Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO) in the early 1960s. The idea of structural violence was first mentioned in Johan Galtung’s article ‘Violence, peace, and peace research’, which was published in Galtung’s *Journal of Peace Research* (Herrick and Bell, 2020)). In this article, Galtung provided a broad definition of violence: violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations (Alma’shum, 2022). In other words, something occurs when humans are influenced in such a way that their actual physical and mental realization is below their potential realization. This definition underlines the idea of violence as an outcome of the difference between the potential and the actual, what has happened and what is happening. Violence occurs when the distance between the potential and the actual increases. Later, Galtung (1971) provided a six-dimensional framework of violence "In short, violence is a physical, emotional, verbal, institutional, structural or spiritual condition, as well as behaviour, attitudes, policies or conditions that weaken, dominate or destroy ourselves and others".

Galtung made a distinction between direct violence and indirect violence. Direct violence involves the use of physical force, such as murder or torture, rape and sexual assault, as well as beatings, including verbal violence, such as insults (Galtung, 1971). In contrast, indirect violence is structural violence, which is not perpetrated by individuals but is hidden in a smaller or wider structure. In the view of Galtung (1969: 170) “We shall refer to the type of violence where there is an actor that commits the violence as personal or direct, and to violence where there is no such actor as structural or indirect... There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (1969, p. 170). Clarifying Demirbas (2019), Galtung states that when there is a subject who perpetrates the act, Galtung terms it personal/direct violence; but, when there is no clearly identifiable subject responsible for the act Galtung terms it structural/indirect violence and attributed it to the silent mechanisms of power structures, rather than to specific individuals.

Rubenstein (2018) exemplifies that in contrast with direct violence, which involves one person acting to harm another, structural violence is indirect and may or may not involve people acting deliberately. For example, If I withhold food from the poor with the intention to starve them to death, that is direct violence. But if the system of food production delivers food only to the rich who can afford to pay for it, and the poor starve because they cannot afford the price, that violence is structural. In the first case, the violence was carried out by a known individual, but in the later scenario, the violence is undertaken by the social system. Another example provided by Ho, (2007) situates it within the experience of African Americans in the USA affected by the HIV pandemic. Ho reasons that in the instance of racial inequality in America, social structures, particularly racism, systematically disadvantage African American men and women who suffer from unequal life chances. In this case, going by Galtung's idea, there is no known individual that directly harms those HIV-infected African American women, rather it is the structure of racial inequality, historically rooted in slavery, that perpetuates constraints in agency and unequal opportunities to receive an education, have access to medical care and justice and to secure a stable job. Thus, at the epi-center of structural violence is exploitation; according to Galtung (1971) the top dogs, get much more out of the interaction in the structure than the other, the underdogs (Galtung, 1990: 293). The top dogs are those who benefit from the societal structure while the underdogs are those who are disadvantaged. It is evident that Structural Violence has its origin in this unequal distribution of power among actors which can further be traced to human agency. This unequal distribution of power then systematically disadvantages those who do not hold as much power, if any power at all (Ho, 2007)

At the center of Galtung's theory is the construct of structure. According to Farmer, (2005: 40) by "structure" is meant historically given, human-made elements of the social fabric (political, economic, social, cultural, and technical mechanisms) that comprise the network of power relations and that constrain agency. Demirbas, (2019) adds that poverty, racism and sexism are examples of such power relations, for they constrain the actions of agents experiencing them. Herrick and Bell, (2020) clarify that in structural violence, institutions, systems and structures either discriminate between people or deny or deprive them of their rights and the ability to satisfy their basic human needs such as survival, well-being, safety, respect, freedom, identity, religion, etc. Structural violence threatens the lives and livelihoods of individuals, groups, communities, etc. and prevents them from developing their potential and realising their goals. It can take the form of repression, exploitation and/or alienation. Here people could be exploited economically, repressed politically and/or alienated culturally by the structure. Slavery and colonialism are some of the examples of structural violence. Farmer (2005: 40) asserts that structural violence is 'not the result of accident or a force majeure; they are the consequence, direct or indirect, of human agency'. Specifically, this human agency is implicated through structures that reflect an unequal distribution of power. While Demirbas, (2019) posits that, these structures were created by human agencies, Rubenstein (2018) asserts that in either a static or dynamic society, direct or personal violence is evident and obvious but structural violence is seen as given or as natural as the air we breathe, in spite of the fact that it is an impediment and obstruction to the realization of objectives by the disadvantaged individuals or groups.

Methodology

Two literary works from two different language mediums and two different literary genres were purposively selected for this study. The first is J.P Clarke's *The Wives' Revolt*, a drama written in English, and the second is T.U Ubesie's *Uwa Ntughari*, a poem written in Igbo, drawn from an anthology of modern Igbo verse edited by Nolie Emenanjo. Out of a total of 65 poems in the collection based on variegated topics, social, cultural, and political, *Uwa Ntughari* written by T.U Ubesie was selected. The two literary works were selected because they bear the same thematic thrust and concern. Additionally, the two ancillary works provide a full account of the subject of gender inequality and the exercise of patriarchal power in two African societies. The reason for the choice of a drama text and a poem is that, whereas drama reenacts reality on stage, the poem represents the perspective of the poet based on societal realities. Both accounts serve to validate the reality of the subject matter in the society and therefore is a boost to reliability. This study employed the content analysis and descriptive research approaches of the qualitative research method which involves explaining the issue, describing, analyzing, and interpreting data on gender inequality as found and portrayed in *The Wives' Revolt* and *Uwa Ntughari*.

Synopsis of J. P. Clark's *The Wives Revolt*

The drama is about the conflict that developed between the men and women of a community known as Erhuwaren. The basis of the conflict is the sharing formula of the money given to the community by an oil company in the Delta area. The money was shared into three parts; the community elders made up of only men were allotted the major share, the other men in their age groups were allotted a significant portion, while the women in their age groups were allotted a portion. Given that women were not a part of the community elders, it was obvious that they were cheated in the distribution. For this reason, the women agitated for equitable distribution of the money and in reaction the community elders further suppressed the women by banishing their goats (which was women's means of income) on the false claim that the goats inhabited witches. Eventually the women revolted by

abandoning their household chores and activities and moved en-masse to another town (Eyara) to decry their lot. In the absence of the women, the men took over the activities of the home albeit with much difficulty, until they actually experienced the pain the women were going through. Out of sheer frustration, the men decided to go and bring their wives back, but the women's return was blighted by an infection they all contracted in Eyara as a result of the poor sanitary condition of the town. In the end, the men apologized and compensated the women and all the differences were resolved.

Synopsis of T.U Ubesie's *Uwa Ntughari*

The poet decries the fact that women want to share equality with men and therefore posits that if they really want that, gender roles should be reversed so that while the men take on female roles the women should take on male roles. But if the women cannot afford to undertake male roles, they should be content with their divinely ordained secondary role in the domestic sphere and maintain the status quo.

Textual Analysis

The data on gender inequality from the two literary works will be presented and analyzed in three designated categories as follows: the basis of gender inequality, the effects of gender inequality, and the response to gender inequality by the victims. The data is presented below.

The Basis of Gender Inequality

In this section, the reasons for inequality between men and women in the two texts will be evaluated. The first reason advanced by the protagonist in the drama and the poet in the poem is that gender inequality in favour of the man is ordained by tradition and the Supreme Being respectively. In the drama, these reasons are provided by the characters in the course of dialogue but in the poem, the poet is the voice stating the position. In J.P Clarke's *The Wives' Revolt*, the women of Erhuwaren were shortchanged on the occasion of the sharing of the money sent by the oil company prospecting oil in the Erhuwaren community. The sharing formula showed glaringly that the men and women of Erhuwaren were not equal; the men were superior and therefore received a major portion of the money from the oil company. When the women reacted through Koko, the men provided reason for the sharing formula as seen in the excerpt below

KOKO: ...Admit it, you rigged the whole thing to do us out of our fair share of the money that the white men paid us.

OKORO: We didn't, I swear. You know as well as I do that it was in strict observance of tradition that we shared the money into three parts

The position of Koko, which is representative of the women is that her ilk were cheated in the sharing of the money. Okoro's explanation is that, the tradition of the land provided for that sharing formula thus absolving the men of blame. Notably, the tradition maintains a gender hierarchy where the elders (men only) are at the helm, followed by the men folk, and then the women folk. Apparently, the women constituted the least in the traditional order and echelon with all the negative implications on personal welfare and interests. There are two main observations in Okoro's stance: first, by stating that "you know as well as I do" he was insinuating that even the women are aware of the tradition and are consenting to it. Secondly, his position is that, since it was the tradition that spelled out the sharing formula, it cannot be questioned, challenged or contested. In other words, nobody can change it, even if it was improper. It was age old tradition that put the community elders first, the men folk second and the women folk last in the scheme of things. It is this tradition that Galtung (1969) refers to as structural violence. The violence which is reflected in the lopsided treatment or discrimination against women is embedded in the socio-cultural structure. The protagonist, Okoro is just the human agent, but the remote provocateur of the discriminatory system is the tradition or social structure which had existed for a long time. This finding confirms Rubenstein's (2018) and Ho's (2007) explication about indirect violence. In this instance, the system or sharing formula in Erhuwaren denied women their fair share of the compensation from the oil company, thereby limiting their resources and by extension, their resourcefulness.

In T.U Ubesie's *Uwa Ntughari*, the poet established the fact that, in family and society, men and women are not equal. This is seen in the excerpt below

*Out ihe m choro igwa unu
Bu na o nweghi mgbe Chukwu
Ji wee nwoke na nwaanyi
Kwuputa si na ha ga-aha*

One thing I want to tell you people
Is that there is no time that God
Considered men and women
And proclaimed that they are equal

The stance of the poet is that gender inequality is ordained by God and therefore, like the character Okoro in *The Wives' Revolt* cannot be challenged or questioned. There are three observations in the poet's position. First, he poses as an authority addressing the world over a singular subject *Out ihe m chorọ igwa unu* "One thing I want to tell you people" that he considers very important. The primacy the poet gives to this theme underscores the weight of the matter in the society and in his estimation. The tone of the poet in this line also betrays him as an inflexible adherent of age-old customs and traditions. Second, he used the negative form to state his stand *o nweghi mgbe Chukwu* "there is no time that God"; the use of the negative form makes the sentence stronger in meaning than if he had used the affirmative form such as *Chukwu si na* "God said that". By using the negative form, he seems to be reacting to those who posit that men and women are equal which strengthens the semantics of the poet's argument. Third, the poet uses the future tense *ga-aha* "will be equal" to signify the timelessness of the divine proclamation on gender disparity. The implication is that, even in the future, irrespective of human evolution, technological advancement and globalization, this divine order remains frozen and unchanging. Going by Galtung's (1969) theory, the reference to God as the one who created inequality between the two genders is a subtle or indirect reference to the socio-cultural structure or tradition of the land that fosters discrimination, and exploited to prove that gender inequality is a given, as stated by Rubenstein (2018).

The second reason advanced in the two texts to justify gender inequality in favour of the men is gender roles. In *The Wives' Revolt*, Koko remonstrates with Okoro about the injustice and pointlessness of giving pigs free rein in the community while banning goats, but Okoro defends the men by invoking gender roles as seen in the excerpt below.

OKORO: Men pay all taxes in this land, that's how it's been since the white man dropped his poll tax upon our individual heads, not sparing the penniless... Now that the white man is paying us a little tax in return, you don't want us to pick up the bag.

In this excerpt, Okoro posits that the money sent from the oil company was a mere compensation for the burden of paying taxes by the men in the community. In his estimation, since the men have been bearing the burden of paying taxes, in exclusion of the women, then it is logical to apportion men a greater proceed of the oil money. The use of the phrase "all taxes" by Okoro without itemizing them is a strategy aimed at magnifying the role played by men against the role played by women. The poll tax he referenced, synonymous with head tax or capitation tax is a flat or uniform tax levied equally on every adult (male) irrespective of income or resources during the colonial period. The fact is that, as purported heads of the family, men are the ones that paid taxes which is part of the role traditionally assigned to them. This accounts for the fact that in Igbo society, in the event of a woman giving birth, when people inquired about the sex of the child, if it is a male child, it will be said that the woman gave birth to tax. The implication is that she has given birth to a potential tax-paying man. The fact that only men paid taxes in that period explains why, in 1929 the women of Aba carried out a demonstration when the British colonists legislated that women should also pay taxes. Okoro's position is that men play harder roles and shoulder more responsibilities in the society than women and therefore deserves more compensation than women. This position is based on the skewed perception that domestic roles mainly undertaken by women are less tasking than outdoor or leadership roles mainly played by men. This fact is echoed in the proclamation by the town crier of Erhuwaren while reacting to the response of the women over the sharing formula, as shown in the excerpt below.

OKORO: ...A most fair and equitable settlement you will never find in any other society, far or near. However, our women folk, led by a few reckless ones, fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives, are repudiating this fair and reasonable distribution of the money...

To buttress the fact that men of this community did not regard or value the domestic roles played by women, Okoro referred to such roles as "simple duties" thus denigrating the women folk and finding no reason for their protest which is seen as reaping where they did not sow. Ironically, in the event of the women's revolt, Okoro and his fellow men were found actually struggling to do such 'simple' things as making fire, cooking and petting children. So, Okoro's argument is that equal distribution of money is irrational since there is no equitable distribution of responsibility. Gender roles are defined and delineated by the structure and used to weaken, dominate, suppress and discriminate against those perceived to be playing a lesser or secondary roles (Galtung, 1971).

In *Uwa Ntughari*, the poet invoked gender role to justify inequality between men and women in Igbo society, as seen in the excerpt below.

Umụ nwaanyị chọwa ichị ụlọ
Ha ga na-eweta ego nri
Nwoke ha na-aluga-aga ahịa
Zụta ihe a ga-esi n'ụlọ
Nwoke zụta nkụ dị akpụ
Wakata ma o kweghi iwa

Ebe nwaanyị ka nwoke ike
Ya bịa nara nwoke anyu ike

If women want to rule the home
They should be bringing money for food
The man they marry should be going to market
To buy things to cook in the house
If the man buys a strong faggot
And breaks until it proves difficult
Since woman is stronger than man
She should come and take the axe from the man

The sum of Ubesie's argument is that, those who play stronger role in the house should rule the home and be equally accorded higher status than those who play lesser role. In this case, Ubesie presents two reasons for gender inequality: first is that men are the bread winners who provide money for food while the women go to market with the money, buy foodstuffs and cook the food for the family. In his opinion, the provision of money is more herculean than going to market and preparing the food in the kitchen. Apparently, the domestic role played by women is downplayed and taken for granted by men. The second reason presented in the data is physical strength; whereas the physical morphology of men puts them in position to undertake exerting and energy sapping assignments, women are not so naturally disposed. The poet argues that, if women really want to rule the home, they should be prepared to engage in such enervating tasks as splitting firewood. The poet's argument is that if women want to reverse the order which places the man above them in status, they should first reverse the order of gender roles. The implication of this reversal is that women should be playing the roles reserved for men while men should be playing the roles reserved for women. In the estimation of the poet, women cannot play men's role, since they do not have the natural capacity to provide sustenance money, neither are they physically disposed to engage in laborious tasks in the family. According to the dictates of structural violence, this is an argument used to limit women and deny them their rights. The problem is that, it is the men who perceive women's role as nothing compared to theirs, and not the women themselves. The women see their roles as tasking as the men see theirs and therefore deserve to be accorded as much respect and status as the men

The Effects of Gender Inequality

In the two texts, certain adverse effects of gender inequality are presented; these negative effects are seen to favour men at the expense of women. Some of them are evidenced in injustice and perception of women by men in the society. In *The Wives' Revolt*, the women represented by Koko are unjustly treated either by denying them free speech which is their right, or their opinions were not considered and did not count, as shown in the excerpt below

OKORO: What is all this, woman? You made your point a hundred times today, when the council of elders resolved into general assembly.

KOKO: Oh yes, so we did. But did your most respected president recognize our individual rights to speak?...Did you see him sliding off into sleep in the middle of the proceedings, then, when nudged awake by his young attendant, how he nodded vigorously to everything you men said?

OKORO: Well, you had your say

KOKO: And you had your way.

The data above reveals that, the women of Erhuwaren were not granted as much right as the men to air their views in the community. Koko agreed sarcastically with Okoro that the women made their point during the general assembly and argued that they were hardly heard and their views were not considered. Her use of the rhetorical question "... did your most respected president recognize our individual rights to speak?" shows that women were not really allowed to speak their mind during the assembly. Equally, Koko's reference to the president of the council of elders slumbering is an indication that, even when a woman was rarely asked to speak, the president chose same time to sleep, thus signifying that the woman's opinion is not worth listening to or considering. This situation is further confirmed by Okoro suggesting that the women had their say, while Koko retorted that the men had their way. The men's having their way signifies that they did what they had decided to do, in spite of the opinion of the women. The implication is that it was just a formality involving women in the assembly or allowing them to express their opinion because in the end, it is the decision of the men folk that holds. Excluding women from decision making is an instance of structural violence as specified by Galtung (1969). Since the council of elders is made up of men only, it shows that women were excluded from decision making, even in matters that concern them. The exclusion is an indirect way of denying them a voice in the community.

Another unjust treatment meted out to the women was the issue of banning animals in the community, as shown in the excerpt below.

KOKORO: ...We cannot have goats wandering about our streets and homesteads uncontrolled. It was enough having them fill the place with filth, but now that we know they also provide refuge for forces of evil, oh yes, that wherever there is a herd of goats there is a coven of witches, our immediate and mandatory duty to the community is to see them safely out of town.

KOKO: ...But, oh no, all you want to do is get on top of us women. There you have your pigs prowling all over the place unmolested, but because you hold the swine in common trust and sell it at inflated prices to Ughelli people at times of festival, while goats are household animals kept by us women, you protect one animal and expel the other out of town.

The act of banning the goats which is reared by women and sparing the pigs which is the business of the men is unjust as seen by Koko's response to Okoro. Okoro's and the men's reason for banning the goats is a mere assumption that the women exploit witchcraft powers and incarnate goats and use them to terrorize citizens of Erhuwaren. The fact is that the men were not comfortable for being challenged by women over the sharing formula and to punish them they decided to ban the ownership and rearing of goats to deprive women economically. This is amply revealed in the response of Koko to Okoro's insistence that the law banning goats is for the interest of the community, as shown in the excerpt below.

KOKO: The law you have passed is bad, unfair and discriminatory, being directed against women because of our stand...

It is obvious that it is the stand of the women against the sharing formula that necessitated the banning of their goats. It is to be noted that the law was passed by the council of elders made up of men alone; hence it is deemed unfair and discriminatory, particularly since the opinion of the women was not sought before enacting the law. Koko's assertion that "all you want to do is get on top of us women" is to prove to the men that the real reason they banned the goats and spared the pigs is to be economically superior to women. Disempowering women is a means of controlling and marginalizing them and making them ever dependent on the men folk for survival. This finding confirms Ho's (2007) position that, at the core of structural violence is exploitation of the weak by the strong, in this instance, exploitation of women by the men of Erhuwaren.

In Uwa Ntughari, the injustice meted out to women as a result of gender inequality is seen in the status and positioning of the two gender as revealed in the excerpt below.

*Mmadu di ndu bikata ndu
Uche ya na njem ana-eme
O si na nkwu fere n'ukwa
O si n'ukwa fee n'akpaka
Na-eche ihe a ga-eme uwa
K'awa hapu ihe o bu di iche
Ka asi na ndi no n'ala
Na-adagbuzi ndi no n'elu*

While a living person is alive
They are always in thought
They jump from palm tree to breadfruit
They jump from breadfruit to oil bean
In thought of how to make the world
To be different from what it is
So as to say that those below
Are suppressing those above

The poet finds it ridiculous that human beings could conceive of a life and the world different from what it is. Precisely, he finds it unimaginable the conception that the order of things could be altered in such a drastic and dramatic way that those on the ground should suppress those above them. In Igbo cosmology, the placements of

objects or nominal reflected during discourse is used to show those that take precedence over others or those that are more important than others. For example, *di na nwunye* “husband and wife” is used to show that the husband, placed first in the nuptial order, is accorded more status than the wife placed second. In the context of the home, the arrangement of *nne na nna* “mother and father” shows that the mother, placed first in the order, is accorded more status than the father placed second. In the same way, the arrangement of *elu na ala* “up/sky and land/earth” is used to indicate that, up/heaven placed first in the order is accorded more status than land/earth placed second. The poet used the idea of *elu* “up/sky” and *ala* “land/earth” in a symbolic way to denote man as the sky and woman as the land, thus indicating that man is above woman. The idiomatic expression *na ndi no n’ala na-adagbuzi ndi no n’elu* “those below are suppressing those above” is a paradox stating the impossibility of that reality. In essence, the poet is maintaining the traditional process where those above suppress those below, meaning that, in Igbo society, it is the men who are above that suppress the women who are below. In the estimation of the poet, this is the natural order, and it is inconceivable to imagine a reversal of the norm whereby women are placed above men. To the poet, jumping from “palm tree to breadfruit and from breadfruit to oil bean” which represents human efforts to change the status quo, amounts to a sheer waste of time and energy. From the poet’s perspective, it is obvious that the Igbo society’s placement of women under men for no other reason except sex voids the dictates of fairness and justice. The exploitation of one’s higher position to suppress another who is lower in the echelon is a perpetration of injustice to the victim. This finding is in consonance with Farmer (2005) who posits that structural violence is the consequence of human agency, implicated through structures that reflect an unequal distribution of power. In this instance, Igbo or African women are at the lowest cadre of the power hierarchy and therefore oppressed by the men who are at the opposite and controlling end.

A critical aspect of the effect of gender inequality as seen in the two texts is the perception of women by men in the society. In both texts men did not see women outside the domestic sphere but always as wives pandering after their needs. In *The Wives’ Revolt*, Okoro expresses a wish for women to restrict themselves in the kitchen, as shown in the excerpt below.

OKORO: A witch in the kitchen, that’s what you are. Why don’t all women stay that way and leave affairs of state to us men? Life would be so much better for everybody.

In the data above, Okoro eulogizes his wife Koko for her culinary prowess and refers to her as a witch in the kitchen meaning that she is an expert in cooking. The use of the phrase “witch in the kitchen” is a hyperbolic construct to designate the height or degree of Koko’s cooking skills. In addition, Okoro expresses a wish that all women should limit themselves within the bounds of the kitchen and stay away from public administration and politics. In his thinking, the public sphere is for men only while the domestic sphere is for women, and therefore both should respect their natural spheres. Therefore, women are forbidden from engaging in affairs of state as it runs contrary to their natural disposition. Such meddling with affairs of state by women is seen as encroachment or going beyond their natural bounds. Furthermore, Okoro views women as only fit for marriage, as seen in the excerpt below

OKORO: If it wasn’t for this free primary education thing they are forcing down our throats with all our farms left unattended and nobody in the house to send on errands for the better part of the day, you’d be far away in some place learning your part as a maiden wife to some man possibly in the depths of Izon land, and then there would have been enough in my bag to marry another wife, just as young as you, and your mother and her kind wouldn’t be doing this their wicked walkout on us men.

In this data, Okoro decries the free primary education which encourages folks to send their children to school; he regrets that attending school prevents him from marrying off his daughter, though still a child and in turn earning sufficient money from the transaction to marry a second wife himself, and one as young as his own child. Evidently, his view of women is that they are meant to be married and nothing more. This perception is a reflection of the state across many African communities; right from the onset, the girl child is groomed by the parents for marriage as she receives the kind of training that is concomitant to wifehood and motherhood. Outside the restrictive walls of marriage, the woman is not seen playing any role. It is for this reason that Okoro’s friend eventually concede that women are being enslaved in the home, as shown in the excerpt below.

OKORO: Oh no, I shall just ask your parents to give me back my dowry.
KOKO: Shameless man, after all I’ve done for you, cooking, washing, bearing children.
IDAMA: There, let’s not name it---it’s a slave’s life for you women...

In the data above, as Koko begins to number her duties in the house, Idama, Okoro's kinsman and friend stops her on the understanding that beyond domestic chores and childbearing, there are a lot more that women do and are capable of doing if granted the opportunity or empowered. His conclusion is that women are leading the life of slaves in the African marriage. Far from suggesting that women are slaves in the home, Idama's view is that the interests and concerns of a married woman is so tied to the home that she has no freedom to pursue any other purpose in life. This slave-like status of women is a reflection of the power relations in the home and society (Farmer, 2005) that positions them as vassals who are tied to the apron strings of their husbands and whose life means nothing outside the home.

The same sentiment is echoed in *Uwa Ntughari*, where the poet argues that if women want to reverse the natural order and become head of the home, they should take the initiative in marriage, as shown in the excerpt below

*O buru na umu nwaanyi
Choro ka anyi kwe na ha ka
Ha buru mmanya bjava okwu
Si na ha na-aju ase nwoke
Ha mee mmanya n'isi nwoke
Duru nwoke lawa be ha
Anyi ekwe na umu nwoke
No n'okpuru umu nwaanyi*

If women
Want us to believe they are above
Let them carry wine and come for talks
Saying they are making inquiries about a man
If they pay the bride price
And take the man to their place
We will agree that men
Are under women

In this stanza above, the poet hinges his argument for gender inequality on marriage rites alone without considering anything outside marriage. In traditional Igbo society, it is the men who carry wine to the potential in-law's house to make initial inquiries about a lady he wants to marry, and eventually pays the bride price before taking the lady home. The poet is of the view that, if women clamouring for gender equity can reverse this tradition, men will cede authority to them, but if they cannot, they should continue to maintain their place under their husbands in the home. Incidentally, the poet did not make other considerations in relation to other aspects of life outside the home such as in business, industry, governance, etc. Thus, the jaundiced position of the poet is reflected in the fact that he did not see women operating in any other sphere in life aside the domestic space.

Reaction to Gender Inequality

In the two texts under study, the reactions to gender inequality by the affected sex are stated. Needless to say that women are the victims who are deprived while men are the victors who benefit from the deprivation of women. In *The Wives' Revolt*, the women of Erhuwaren eventually revolted against the men and their oppressive laws, as shown in the excerpt below.

IDAMA: Yes, our wives have gone, they walked out on us, they have emigrated in protest against our unjust law.
OKORO: Who would have thought they had the might and mind.
IDAMA: ...Yes, all are gone---handmaid, head wife, most favoured wife, nursing mother, and pregnant wife, they have all left town.

In the data above, Idama announces to Okoro that the women of Erhuwaren have abandoned home for them in protest for the unjust law banning their goats. It is made clear here that the women's flight is to protest the injustice against them perpetrated by the men. Okoro's response to the news "who would have thought they had the might and mind" reveals a reason why men always lord things over women; men see women as docile, weak and incapable of fighting their ill fate. The implication of the women's revolt is that men are now left to run the home entirely on their own, particularly to undertake those domestic chores they think are nothing. Now, left to take care of the home, the men discover that chores are not as simple as they thought; Idama and Okoro could not make fire with woods, Idama could not fetch water from a well, not to talk of Okoro's challenge of petting and rocking his child to stop crying. In the end, the men admit and acknowledge the important roles women play in the house

which are pivotal to the development of the home and society, and they made sacrifices to resolve their differences, including revisiting their unjust laws.

In Uwa Ntughari, the poet states that women are protesting their lot and taking a stand on gender equality as shown in the excerpt below.

*Nke na-ewu n'oge ugbu a
Bụ na ụmụ nwaanyi na-ekwu
Na ọbụ Chi kere nwoke
Buru ya kere ụmụ nwaanyi
Ebe mmadu dum bu mmadu
Ha na ụmụ nwoke ga-aha
I jewe ikwu, ha ana-arụ ụka
Na ụwa dum na-asaghe anya*

What is trending in this time
Is that women are saying
That it is God who created man
Is the One who created woman
Since humans are humans
They and men should be equal
If you want to talk, they will argue
That the whole world is opening their eyes

The excerpt above indicates that in the Igbo society, women are protesting against the tradition that has kept them under the rule of men. The first line of the stanza *Nke na-ewu n'oge ugbu a* "What is trending in this time" shows that, this is a recent incident. The protest of the women, according to the poet is anchored on two premises; first is that since God created both man and woman, then there is no reason for gender inequality and therefore man and woman should operate at the same level. The second reason is western civilization or globalization seen in *Na ụwa dum na-asaghe anya* "That the whole world is opening their eyes". This is an indication that, through education, the average Igbo woman is enlightened and exposed to current realities all over the world in relation to gender relations, and so would like to be like liberated women in other places in the world. This trend is a challenge to the age-old Igbo and African tradition that situates women in the home where they are meant to perform domestic roles under the dictates of their husbands. Juma (2019, in Ordu and Odukwu (2022), is of the view that throughout history, women have protested and fought against patriarchy and a predominantly misogynistic culture.

In sum, the two texts, *The Wives' Revolt* and Uwa Ntughari explored the issues of gender inequality in African societies, highlighting their basis and effects. However, whereas in *The Wives' Revolt*, the men realize their errors and took major steps to resolve their conflict with the women, in *Uwa Ntughari*, the poet maintains his position that the status quo should persist. The major reason for this variation is the genre; whereas *The Wives' Revolt* is a play with characters depicting the issue from different perspectives, *Uwa Ntughari* is the sole voice and perspective of the poet.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the two texts demonstrate that African women are discriminated against and dominated by men through unjust systems or structures. This state of affairs is a consequence of patriarchy, or the rule of men. In patriarchal societies, it is the men that take decisions and enforce them and women are not involved in decision making, directly or indirectly. According to Galtung, (1969) violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power; in the context of the two texts, this structure is found in the tradition that guides patriarchal expression of power and control in the community. In this power arrangement, as stated by Galtung (1990), there are two power poles termed the top-dogs and the underdogs; the top-dogs are those who control and benefit from the societal structure while the underdogs are those who are dominated and disadvantaged. Thus, in the patriarchal African system, men constitute the top-dogs while women constitute the underdogs. According to Ho, (2007) unequal distribution of power systematically disadvantages those who do not hold as much power because they are not in position of control. Going by the findings, men deliberately exploit women in order to perpetuate their low status so that they (men) will continue to control them. Emakhu, (2013) avers that, despite the fact that women boast of a significant proportion of the Nigerian demography, they are consistently relegated and plagued with intense marginalization and discrimination in virtually all facets of society such as the home, school, industry, and politics. In his view, underlying this discrimination is the Nigerian Patriarchal system which strictly restricts women to the stereotyped role of home keepers, child bearers and child rearers, and equally prefers and elevates

male children above female children. In support of this position, Amiriheobu and Owunari, (2019) hold that such unhealthy discrimination and marginalization has various adverse effects in the society such as restraining economic growth, and hindering societal evolution, which has resulted in social vices, namely, corruption, dictatorship, nepotism, favouritism, divide and rule, and financial malfeasance of varying sorts. Consequently, the women's revolt in the two texts represents a protest against the structure or tradition that hold them captive. It is a clarion call, not really for a reversal of power relations in favour of women as exemplified by Ubesie in *Uwa Ntughari*, but for reappraisal and reconsideration of a tradition or structure whereby a particular gender (male) is given so much power, while the other (women) are denied so much power. It is a call for a dispassionate and unbiased reassessment and reevaluation of the role played by both genders to determine whose role is actually more demanding, and on that basis restructure or harmonize power relations. It is also a call for inclusivity; women want to be involved in decision making in the community so that their interests will be taken into consideration when making laws that affect them. In the absence of these, institutional structures and systems will continue to deprive women of their rights and the ability to satisfy their basic human needs and reach their full potential as specified by Herrick and Bell, (2020).

Findings from the study further reveal the tendency of situating women within the confines of the home only. The fact remains that women play other roles outside the home, although they are either not recognized or they are viewed with cynicism and skepticism. Aside the need to acknowledge the sacrifices women make in the home front and accord them their rightful entitlement, it is equally important to recognize and admit the role played by women in different aspects of society. According to Abiola and Larne, (2003), apart from their domestic roles, women play other vital roles in the Nigerian society such as goods producers, community organizers, socio-cultural agents, and political activists, but regrettably, such efforts are not lauded. Studies have shown that women are naturally disposed to environmental sustainability. Mukherjee (2013) is of the view that rural women particularly, who depend on the eco-system for their daily needs of food, water, fuel, herbs, etc perceive the environment as an important resource for survival and therefore are naturally inclined to preserve it. The United Nations conference on Environment and Development, or the Earth Summit held in Rio in 1992 was an assembly of women from various parts of the globe to deliberate on issues of environmental health seen by the UN as critical to meaningful development. Principle 20 of the Rio Declaration states that: "women play vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieving sustainable development". Thus, that convention recognized and established women as key players in environmental management and conservation of the eco-system and natural resources. The rest of the world, including African communities should take a clue from the Rio Convention to prioritize the efforts women make in environmental sustenance and in other fields of human endeavour. It is for this reason that Clarke's play posits that the only remedy against the negative effects of gender inequality in Nigeria is the unbiased engagement of both men and women in matters relating to the concerns and interest of the whole community.

Conclusion

This study has exposed the grounds for gender inequality, the effects and their consequences in society, as revealed in two literary texts. From the study, it is established that gender inequality is as old as African oral tradition. That such acts of discrimination against women has persisted till the present time, in spite of technological advancements, education and globalization, is an indication of the power of patriarchy. The continuation of age old beliefs and patriarchal assumptions is symptomatic of a static society and a negation of cultural dynamism and evolution. Since Africa has witnessed changes in virtually every aspect of life as a result of westernization, it seems long overdue for a reconsideration of the ethos of patriarchy, which is at the root of gender inequality. An Igbo adage states that *egwu dagharja, ogba egwu agbagharja* "When the music beat changes, the dancer will also change dance step". Far from clamouring for gender equality, this study is of the view that gender roles should be harmonized such that complementarity should be the underlying principle in the home. Rather than role exclusivity, which is restrictive, an inclusive system will require men to play a secondary role in the domestic domain to enhance understanding and appreciation of women's efforts. Men engaging in house chores will not cost them their leadership status, rather it will enhance it as custodians of the home. Precisely, sweeping and cooking in no way belittles a man; rather they strengthen his hold on the family, and further earns him more respect from an understanding wife. In sum, if this inclusive approach is not effected in the home, domestic conflict and violence will continue to characterize the home and marital harmony and peace will continue to be elusive.

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