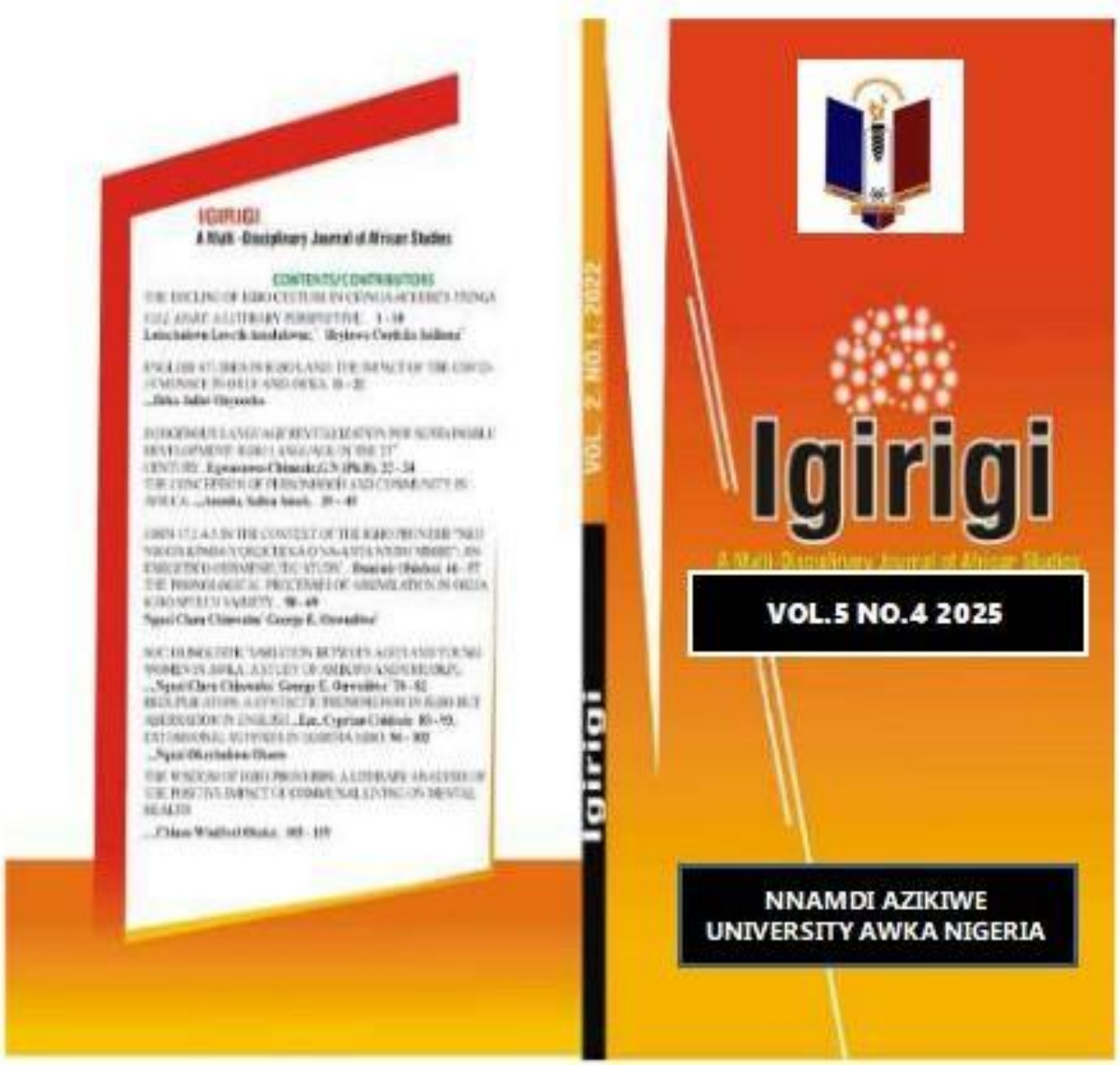


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USE OF SEMANTIC MAPPING AND CONTEXT CLUES IN INSTRUCTION AS EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR READING COMPREHENSION AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN JOS SOUTH LGA PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Nigeria, English is an essential language for any pedagogical engagement. Reading comprehension is a vital aspect of the examination conducted by West African Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) for final year students of secondary schools in Nigeria. Therefore, the study aims to investigate how senior secondary school (SS2) students' reading comprehension performance will improve through instruction in semantic mapping and context clues. Semantic mapping is where meaning is derived from the surrounding environment of a word as they seek for association or relationship with other words and Context clues are the words, phrases, and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word that can help and explain or give clues to its meaning. A sample of 160 (one hundred and sixty) students were drawn from two schools in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The two groups were drawn from the same population of 1,878, one of which was the experimental group and the other, the control group. While the experimental group was exposed to the treatment, the control group was not. The quasi- experimental research design was adopted in this study since scheduling and implementation of experimental treatment conditions or randomization and grouping of subjects was not possible. The data for the study were collected using the Adapted Structured Test (AST) which was based on a reading prose passage adopted from the New Oxford Secondary English Course for SSS2. New Edition (NOSEC). The reading passage was used for both the pre-test and the post-test. The achievement of the students was based on their ability to use semantic maps and context clues to replace given words or phrases with other words or phrases which mean the same as used in the comprehension passage. The findings showed a better performance of students' achievement in the post-test than that of the pre-test. It also revealed that the students' performance in reading comprehension after instruction in semantic mapping and context clues is improved. Following the findings, it is recommended that teachers of English Language devote part of their instructional time to teach ways students can identify and use semantic maps and context clues during reading sessions.

Keywords: ***Instruction, semantic mapping, Context Clues, Strategies, Reading Comprehension***

Introduction

The place of English language in global activities cannot be overemphasized. According to Crystal (2003), it is a global means of communication and spoken in numerous countries of the world for the purpose of education, technology, commerce, telecommunication, medicine among others. The rise in globalization has tremendously contributed to the spread of English and English Language

Teaching (ELT). Consequently, English as an International Language (EIL) is taught and learned as a Second Language (ESL) in countries formerly colonized by Britain and as a Foreign Language (EFL) in countries like Japan, and China. The English language comprises four language skills categorized into productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (reading and listening).

In Nigeria, English is an essential linguistic tool for any pedagogical engagement which are the teaching and learning process. Hence, the National Policy on Education (2014), clearly stipulates that English should be taught as a subject in primary schools while the medium of instruction at this level remains the language of the environment for the first three years. It further avers that from the fourth year, English should predominantly be used as the medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment should be taught as a subject. The importance of English is x-rayed by the requisite credit pass in English for an applicant to secure admission to any tertiary institution in Nigeria. Subsequently, upon entry into any tertiary institution in Nigeria, a course tagged 'Use of English' has to be taken and passed by an undergraduate before graduation. Considering the vital role assumed by English, in Nigerian education, instruction in both productive and receptive language skills (which include the reading skill) must be effective.

To receive information, reading is an indispensable language skill for learners. Since they are subject to a continuous flow of information, learners need to prepare themselves for the demands placed on them by reading in school and in the bigger society. Generally, information is received and acted upon when there is understanding—that is comprehension. Abeeleh, Al- Ghazo and Al-Sobh (2021) say that reading comprehension is concerned with the capacity of the reader to obtain meaning from what is read and also involves the sub-skills of word recognition, fluency, lexical knowledge as well as pre-existing knowledge to be undertaken quickly so that the reader gets knowledge from text. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2016) also agree that reading is essential to learning and the ultimate goal of teaching reading is comprehension, a critical proficiency which considerably affects the entire life of the learner.

In students' attempting to demystify new words in a passage for the purpose of understanding, they can use these clues to mark words that they believe will help them decipher the meaning of given word(s) as semantic mapping is a strategy for graphically representing concepts. Semantic maps portray the schematic relations that compose a concept therefore, semantic mapping strategy helps students, especially struggling students, to identify, understand and recall the meaning of words they read in the text. It visually displays the meaning-based connections between a word or phrase and a set of related words or concepts (Zorfass, Gray & Powerup WHATWORKS, 2014). Neneng (2015) opines that semantic mapping can be applied by the teacher in the classroom to improve students' reading comprehension.

Similarly, context clues are the available hints in a text which can facilitate the reader's understanding of novel words within a sentence, paragraph, or passage (Putri & Fitrawati, 2019). Students can use context clues to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word they come across in their reading.

Objectives

The aim of this study is to ascertain the effects of instruction in semantic mapping and context clues on senior secondary school students' achievement in reading comprehension. The specific objectives of this study are to:

i. investigate the students' ability to accurately replace words or phrases with other words or phrases,

ii. find out the ability of students to correctly summarize a given passage,
iii. determine the students' ability to correctly retell/paraphrase sentences in a given passage,
iv. determine students' ability to answer factual or direct comprehension questions correctly.

Statement of Problem

Learning how to read information text to obtain content-area knowledge becomes critical in reading. Vocabulary knowledge, as identified by Mbah and Ogbonnaya-Iduma (2016), is one of the fundamental reading difficulties of many students. Reading comprehension constitutes a vital aspect of final examinations taken by final year students in WAEC (West African Examination Council) and NECO (National Examination Council) WASSCE (West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination) in Nigeria. It requires the students to carefully read the comprehension passages and answer the questions on them.

The Chief Examiner's Report on the West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WAEC) (2023) on students' results in English Language have shown that there is an improvement although not totally commendable as there was a lot of weaknesses in the area of comprehension. The failure in this subject has been partly attributed to candidates' inability to correctly answer the comprehension questions which include vocabulary replacement and this according to Okeke (2013) is caused by the methods and strategies of teaching the reading skill which is the core of the school curriculum. Poor pedagogical methods and strategies of teaching reading comprehension have been assumed to be responsible for this poor performance.

Consequently, this research attempted to examine the effectiveness of instruction in semantic mapping and context clues with a view to improve achievement in reading comprehension of senior secondary school students. Semantic mapping and Context clues have a place in language teaching and learning pedagogy.

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. To what extent are students who were taught reading comprehension using semantic mapping and context clues able to replace words and phrases with the correct synonyms of used words in reading materials?
2. How are students who were taught reading comprehension using semantic mapping and context clues able to retell / paraphrase the given passage?
3. How are students who are taught reading comprehension using semantic mapping and context clues able to summarize given passage.
4. To what extent are students who were taught reading comprehension using semantic mapping and context clues able to answer given questions on passage?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be beneficial to English Language teachers, students, curriculum planners, course book writers, the Government and stakeholders in education. Teachers of English will see the need to teach semantic mapping and context clues in reading comprehension. To students who are second learners of English Language, it will help them identify better ways of mastering new words found in reading texts/passages. To the curriculum planners, this research will be impactful in the place of planning the language curriculum, to see the need to give reading a place in the curriculum as a subject and deliberate attention be given in the structuring of the strategies of

teaching reading to serve as guide to teachers of English. To other researchers, it will enable them use the findings of this research to study on other strategies for teaching reading comprehension.

Literature Review

Nature and Process of Reading

Reading is a key factor both in the success of an individual and in the development of a nation. It is an individual's hope for the future, a ladder to an individual's success. Good reading ability is particularly critical as a key to job efficiency and professional growth. Ofuani and Gbenedio (2016) maintain that reading encompasses the active participation of the reader who makes connections between existing knowledge and the construction of meaning from the materials read. Reading is more than just seeing words clearly, calling or pronouncing printed words correctly, or even recognizing the meaning of isolated words. It is a process because it involves understanding the meaning of written symbols, typically letters and words and to extract information from print.

Reading Comprehension

Reading requires a lot from the brains. To decode each word, put those words together into sentences and paragraphs, one cannot understand a text without knowing what most of the words mean. Comprehension is the process of making sense of words, sentences and connected text. Comprehension is the major purpose of reading which without, reading is a meaningless activity regardless of age or ability of the reader. It should be noted that the way teachers teach reading comprehension has an important influence on whether or not learners view reading as a meaningful activity.

Semantic Mapping

In order for students to increase their vocabulary knowledge, they may need to know word learning strategies that will help them learn words independently. The use of semantic mapping is one strategy students can use to independently learn words on their own without interrupting the comprehension process. Semantic mapping is a strategy for graphically representing concepts. Graphic organizers can be used as a pre-reading strategy to activate prior knowledge and to introduce key vocabulary words. It can also be used as a post-reading activity to connect words, categories, and new concepts. Students can add to the map and/or alter it after they have finished reading.

The semantic mapping strategy helps students especially struggling students to identify, understand and recall the meaning of words they read in the text. It visually displays the meaning-based connections between a word or phrase and a set of related words or concepts (Zorfass, Gray & Powerup WHATWORKS, 2014). Semantic mapping can be applied by the teacher in the classroom to improve students' reading comprehension (Neneng 2015). Semantic mapping is where meaning is derived from the surrounding environment of a word as they seek for association or relationship with other words. Semantic mapping seeks for the relationship that a word has with other words that are similar to it.

Types of Semantic Maps

There are many types of semantic maps to help understand new words. This study discusses some types of semantic maps which include **a descriptive or thematic map, network map, spider map, a problem-solution outline, a fishbone map, a compare-contrast matrix, a series of events**

chain. These maps have a tree structure with one trunk and many branches which are examples of organic thinking. That is, like a tree, a central idea (the trunk) branches off in many directions.

A **descriptive or thematic map** works well for mapping generic information, but particularly well for mapping hierarchical relationships; **network tree** aims to organize a hierarchical set of information, reflecting superordinate or subordinate elements; **a spider map** can help with organization when the information relating to a main idea or theme does not fit into a hierarchy; **a problem-solution outline** helps students to compare different solutions to a problem; **a fishbone map** may be particularly useful when cause-effect relationships are complex and non-redundant; **a compare-contrast matrix** can help students to compare concepts' attributes; **a series of events chain** can help students organize information according to various steps or stages. Semantic maps can be in these forms:

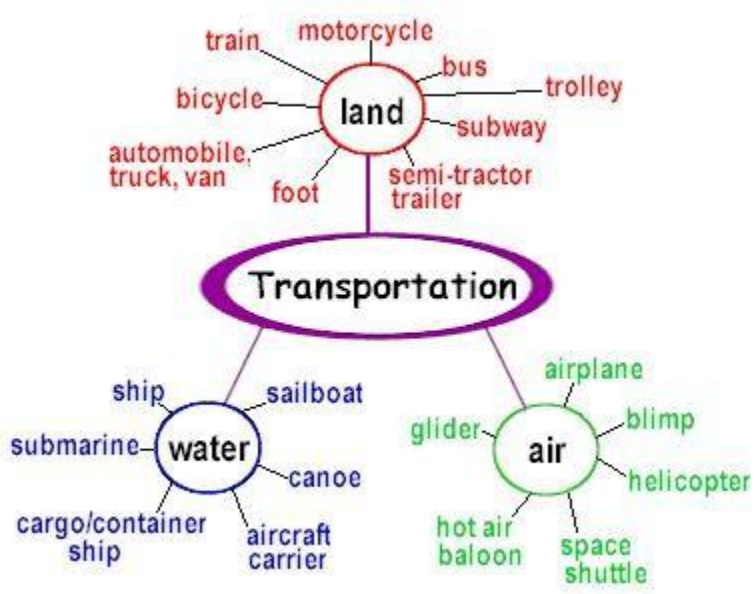


Figure I: A bubble topical organizer by Brown (2015)

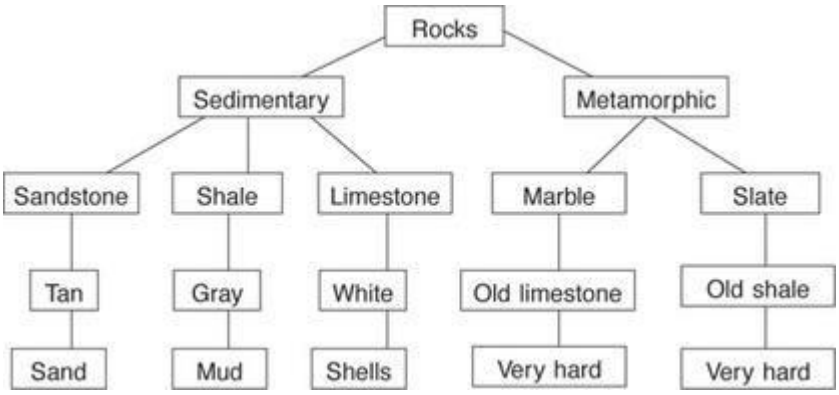


Figure II: A hierarchical topical organizer by (Blodgett, n.d)

Context Clues

Another strategy to use in order to improve students' reading comprehension is the context clues. Context clues are hints of information that help the reader figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words. Context clues are the words, phrases, and sentences that surround an unfamiliar word that can help and explain or give clues to its meaning. Students can use context clues to figure out the meaning of an unfamiliar word they come across in their reading. Bailey (2014) says that when you encounter a word you do not know as you are reading, you can choose to look it up in a dictionary, ignore it or use the surrounding words to help you determine what the word means. The context around any unfamiliar word tells something about its meaning. Tatyana (2013) asserts that context clues are hugely important because their comprehension and effective usage leads to academic success. Kiani (2011) in Sayed and Hamid (2013) stipulates that context clues have a powerful effect on students' comprehension of words and sentences. Knowledge and skill of using words in different contexts play an important role in the comprehension of new concepts, ideas and principles. Often, using context clues mean we do not have to check a dictionary or other reference material, allowing us to continue reading with less disruption (Tatyana, 2013).

Types of Context Clues

There are five types of context clues as described by Georgakopoulos and Polis (2018): example, definition, synonym, antonym, and experience.

A student can look for examples, illustrations or explanations. Difficult or uncommon words may be followed by information to help discern the meaning. Example clues list examples of the unknown word, often in the same sentence. For example: *The boy likes to eat (lots of red meat),* ***such as hamburgers, steaks, and beef roasts.*** A writer sometimes uses phrases to help identify examples and explanations like *for example, such as, including, consists of, for instance, is like.*

Definitions are embedded in the text. In a definition clue, the author provides the reader with the specific definition, or meaning, of a word right in the sentence. Words such as **are, is, means, and refers to,** can signal that a definition clue may follow. For example: *After the fire, the entire office was (restricted),* ***that is only a few people could enter, for several days****. The factory supervisor demanded an (inspection),* ***which is a careful and critical examination of all of the meats processed each day****.* In these examples, the definitions are directly built into the sentences.

Sometimes, surrounding words or phrases contain synonyms of the unknown word. In a synonym context clue, a synonym to the unknown word is used in the same sentence or in a sentence before or after it to give the reader the meaning of the more difficult word. For example: *He is envious of her new car,* ***feeling jealous****, since he drives his grandpa's old car.*

Antonyms can also be used to help readers figure out the meaning of a word. Antonym clues use words that are the opposite of the unknown word to better explain the unknown word to the reader. For example: *He sometimes acts idiotic, but he is actually very* ***smart****.*

Joe was exhausted after the trip but Tom was ***wide awake and alert.***

Experiences can also be used to explain unknown words. A reader may also infer a word's definition by using context clues combined with logic or prior knowledge even without specific words introducing the meaning of an unknown word, phrases and sentences in the paragraph give further explanation, often enough to make a logical or educated guess as to the meaning of the word.

Methodology

Research Design

A quasi-experimental research design was adopted in the study. Two groups were used for the study: the experimental and control groups. While the experimental group was exposed to the treatment, the control group was not. Quasi experimental research design was adopted in this study since scheduling and implementation of experimental treatment conditions or randomizations and grouping of subjects were not possible. There was no randomization of students into the treatment and control groups. This design has been chosen because intact classes was used to avoid disruption of normal classes. Moreover, strict experimental design was not acceptable to secondary school administrators (because of classroom groupings, strict time tabling and school locations).

Area of the Study

The area of the study is the Jos South Local Government of Plateau State, Nigeria. The study was restricted to all the public senior secondary schools in this Local government.

Population of the Study

The population consisted of all the public senior secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State, Nigeria. The population to be used for the study consists of senior Students 2 of Government Secondary Schools in Jos South Local Government Area of Plateau State. There are twenty (20) senior secondary schools in Jos South Local Government Area. The population of the SS2 students in the twenty (20) schools in Jos South Local Government Area is 1,878.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Before the sample was drawn, the total number of schools was categorized according to location and two schools out of the twenty (20) schools in the local government area were drawn as sample. 160 students (one hundred and sixty) from two intact classes of SS2 of the selected schools were randomly selected as sample and assigned to experimental and control groups.

Table 1: Distribution of SS2 Students Population and Sample

S/No	Name of School	Population	Sample
1.	Government Secondary School Gyel, Bukuru (Experimental Group)	100	80
2.	Government Secondary School, Bukuru, Jos South (Control Group)	100	80
Total		200	160

Instrument for Data Collection

The researcher used the Adapted Structured Test with the acronym AST based on reading comprehension content containing semantic maps and context clues.

Description of Instrument

The Adapted Structured Test (AST) was used for both the pre-test and the post-test. The instrument consisted of four sections. Section A contains synonyms of concept words while section B

has sentence making using concept words. Section C and section D contain summary in retelling of passages and answering of comprehension questions respectively. A list of concept words identified in a passage was given in isolation, and students were led to think of as many words as they could to be used in place of the concept words. After the students were through with reading the passages, they were required to make sentences of their own with the concept words given and then summarize the passages in one paragraph in order to test their retelling ability.

Procedure for the Development of the Instrument

The instrument is adapted from the passage on 'Bride-Price and Polygamy' page 19 - 20 in the textbook *New Oxford Secondary English Course for SSS2. New Edition (NOSEC)* 2011 by Ayo Banjo, Uzoma Onaga, Ben Elugbe and Ayo Akano

Validity of Instrument

The researcher presented the instrument to one (1) expert of English Language Education at the Plateau State Polytechnic for validation. The expert gave professional advice and corrections in the area of items and sections of the instrument. The instrument is constructed in line with the process of testing reading comprehension after instruction in semantic mapping and context clues.

Reliability of Instrument

The instrument was trial tested in a pilot study in Government Secondary School, Du, one of the schools in Jos-South Local government Area although it was not used for the main study. 20 (twenty) students were used in the pilot study. The students used possessed the same educational and social characteristics. The purpose of the pilot study was to further validate the instrument for the main study. The scores from the two schools (which was obtained by using the WAEC marking scheme) from the comprehension passage was used to determine the reliability coefficient using Cronbach Alpha. Cronbach's alpha is the average value of the reliability coefficient one would obtain for all possible combinations of items when split into two half-tests.

Method of Data Analysis

The research questions were answered using the mean and standard deviation while the t-Test statistics for paired sample was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. This statistical tool was employed because the study involved independent and dependent variables and intends to ascertain the mean achievement scores of students' performance in reading comprehension for both experimental and control groups.

The data were analyzed using t-test statistics for paired sample to find out whether there was a change in the ability of students' achievement in reading comprehension after being exposed to treatment in semantic mapping and context clues. t-test statistical technique was used to test the entire hypothesis in the study.

Results and Discussion

Research Question One

Table 2: The Mean and Variance of Pretest Posttest of the Experimental Group in using Synonyms during Reading Comprehension

Variation	N	MEAN	SD		MEAN	SD
	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP				CONTROL GROUP	
Pretest	80	1.6520	.78580		1.7600	.66678
Posttest	80	2.9250	1.59336		1.8100	.77756

In Table 2 the pretest mean achievement score of the experimental group which is 1.6520 with a standard deviation of 0.78580 is less than the posttest mean achievement score of the experimental which is 2.9250 and the standard deviation is 1.59336. This is an indication that the students in experimental group were able to achieve higher and better in the posttest than in the pretest in the use of synonyms in reading comprehension.

Research Question Two

Table 3: The Mean and Variance of Experimental Group in summarizing a given passage after Treatment

Variation	N	MEAN	SD		MEAN	SD
	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP				CONTROL GROUP	
Pretest	80	1.3000	1.0426		1.8500	.94756
Posttest	80	2.4500	3.3500		1.8400	.89756

Table 3 shows the pretest mean achievement score of the experimental group which is 1.3000 with a standard deviation of 1.04268 is less than the posttest mean achievement score of the experimental which is 2.4500 and the standard deviation is 3.3500. The mean score indicates that the students in experimental group achieved higher and better in the posttest than in the pretest in the in replacing words or phrases with other words or phrases after treatment.

Research Question Three

Table 4: The Mean and Variance of Experimental Group in Retelling the Passage after the Treatment?

Variation	N	MEAN	SD		MEAN	SD
	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP				CONTROL GROUP	
Pretest	80	3.0750	.72858		3.0500	1.9643
Posttest	80	4.1000	1.36410		3.2000	1.9876

Table 4 shows the pretest mean achievement score of the experimental group which is 3.0750 with a standard deviation of 0.72858is less than the posttest mean achievement score of the experimental which is 4.1000 and the standard deviation is 1.36410. The statistical outcome is an indication that the students in experimental group are better after the treatment than they did before the treatment in retelling the passage.

Research Question Four

Table 5: The Mean and Variance of the Experimental Group in Answering Comprehension Questions

Variation	N	MEAN	SD		MEAN	SD
	EXPERIMENTAL GROUP				CONTROL GROUP	
Pretest	80	4.1250	1.38096		2.2500	1.8567
Posttest	80	5.3500	1.61006		3.3400	1.8745

Table 5 indicates that the pretest mean achievement score of the experimental group which is 4.1250 with a standard deviation of1.38096 is less than the posttest mean achievement score of the experimental which is 5.3500 and the standard deviation is 1.61006. The result shows that students' achievement was higher after being introduced to context clues and how they are used in answering comprehension questions.

Discussion

In discussing the results of this study, it is important to consider the purpose of this study which is to find out the effects of instruction in semantic mapping and context clues on SS2 students' achievement in reading comprehension. In view of this, in table 2, the instruction the experimental group of this study was exposed to have caused a change in the result of the posttest given while the results of the control group remained poor as they were not exposed to instruction in semantic mapping and context clues in reading comprehension.

Going by the analysis of the findings, the P-value of the pretest posttest of the experimental group in synonym was .000 which is less than the degree of freedom; that means that the experimental group performed better than the control group that P-value was greater than the degree of freedom. This proves Tatyana (2013) and Neneng (2015) assertions that Semantic mapping and context clues can be applied by the teacher in the classroom to improve students' reading comprehension and are hugely important because their comprehension and effective usage lead to academic success.

The better performance by the experimental group over the control group in the use of synonyms and replacing words or phrases with other words or phrases cannot be far from the fact that they were exposed to explicit instruction in semantic mapping and context clues. There is an exception though in the items of retelling of passage and answering of comprehension questions in table 4 and 5. Here, the control group performed slightly well as obtained in the P-value of .019 and .023 respectively. That means that the P-value is greater than the degree of freedom. It would seem that the better performance of the control group in retelling and answering of comprehension questions may be because they understood the passage and so can retell it and answer questions on the passage.

From the foregoing discussion, it implies that given the appropriate instruction in semantic mapping and context clues, students can improve their reading comprehension. This is evident with the experimental group that did better after receiving instruction to improve their achievement in reading comprehension.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study explained above, it can be concluded that when semantic mapping and context clues are taught well, it will enhance understanding of reading materials. Although, the use of semantic mapping and context clue are strategies out of many others to helping students in reading comprehension, teachers of English are encouraged to use semantic mapping and context clues because they are straight forward and their types make it easier for students to comprehend unknown words or concepts. Teachers of English are also encouraged to be more attentive and interested at following how much their students are able to comprehend during lessons of reading comprehension.

The study has revealed that it is possible for students to comprehend a reading text if they are given explicit instructions in semantic mapping and context clues. Also, students should be given enough time during reading comprehension lessons to learn how to recognize and use these methods during reading as this will enhance their comprehension.

Recommendations

From the outcome of the study, it is seen that reading comprehension is an important and integral aspect of English Language that when properly handled can lead to students' success in their academic pursuit. Since semantic mapping and context clues have been seen to be strategies that can be used to improve students' ability in reading comprehension, the following recommendations are made:

1. Rather than teach contents only, it might appear advantageous for teachers of English Language wishing to enhance their students' reading comprehension, devote part of their instructional time to teaching ways on how students can identify and use semantic mapping and context clues during reading lessons.

2. It is also pertinent for teachers handling reading comprehension to be knowledgeable about strategies of teaching reading comprehension, especially, using semantic mapping and context clues.
3. Explicit instruction in semantic mapping and context clues should be provided by teachers before students embark on reading comprehension exercises. This will make the students build interest in reading rather than getting frustrated because they do not understand the passage due to difficult vocabulary. This will also reduce the high rate of failure in context area subjects in public examinations since general poor performance is attributed to poor comprehension of concepts in reading texts.
4. Furthermore, an inclusion of strategies to teaching reading, of which include semantic mapping and context clues, in the curriculum of English Language teaching will go a long way at enhancing both teaching and learning, especially in the area of reading comprehension. Deliberate actions should be taken by the English Language curriculum planners to improve the teaching and learning during reading comprehension lessons.
5. In addition, school administrators should make reading a subject thereby giving it a space on the time table. This is in the bid to making students achieve an all-round success academically.

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A COMPARATIVE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION PATTERNS IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND TECHNICAL / VOCATIONAL CENTRES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
Classroom communication patterns are crucial in all activities in the classrooms at all levels. Without appropriate classroom communication patterns, it would be impossible for the learners to comprehend the teachers' lessons. This study investigates a comparative discourse analysis of classroom communication patterns in selected secondary schools and technical and vocational centres in Lagos State, Nigeria. The research explores how classroom discourses differ across two educational settings, focusing on teacher-student interactions, turn-taking, questioning techniques, and the use of instructional language to classroom interactions. Using a qualitative research design, data were gathered through classroom participant observations and audio recordings from teachers and students in selected secondary schools and technical/vocational schools in Lagos State. Four (4) schools, two secondary schools (one private and one public: Childbest Schools and Ikorodu Senior Secondary school), one technical schools (Ikorodu Technical College and one vocational centre (Ikorodu Skill Acquisition Centre) were selected. A total of 6104 participants, 4 teachers and 6100 students constitutes our sample. The discourse analysis framework adopted in this study is John Austin's (1962) The Speech Art Theory. One of the major findings reveals that there are differences in communication styles, with secondary schools demonstrating overloaded patterns and teacher-centred discourse, while technical and vocational schools exhibit unstructured discourse patterns with student-centered communication patterns. The research highlights the implications of these patterns in pedagogical effectiveness, students' engagements, and curriculum delivery. The study therefore recommends a more student-centred communicative strategies to be utilized in secondary schools so that interactive goals of these educational institutions can be achieved.

Keywords: Communication patterns, pedagogical effectiveness, students' engagements, questioning technique

1. Introduction

Communication discourse patterns are very crucial in teaching and learning processes. According to Fadilah et al., 2023) communication patterns are "various types of models that describe the communication process". They include but not limited to student-centred patterns, teacher-centered, interactive/collaborative patterns, verbal and non-verbal communications patterns. These interactions and communications shape transmission, receptions, constructions and reconstructions of classroom discourse. According (Tai, 2024), the commonest type of teacher-student interaction in classroom discourse is the Initiation-Response-Feedback (IRF) sequence. Although this pattern is common, (Deji-Afuye & Zhou, 2025) submit that it "limits the opportunities for students to engage in

meaningful discourse and critical thinking." Discourse strategies direct and redirect classroom discourses thereby influencing them positively or negatively depending on how they are applied. In other words, classroom discourse patterns influence educational effectiveness by assisting students to be engaged during teaching; critical thinking and in the overall learning processes. Also classroom ineffectiveness can also be exhibited where the teachers and learners misuse these strategies.

Understanding is quick where the right or appropriate communication patterns are used for appropriate learners. Discourse communication patterns therefore acts as a catalysts in teaching and learning processes. According to communication pattern is a "deep understanding of interaction patterns between teachers and students can help develop more effective and student-centred learning models" (Luthfiyati, 2024).

Nigeria has a structural educational system that is conventional and unconventional; the selected schools are conventional. Secondary schools offer general academic education which is specifically focus on distinct instructional goals and classroom dynamics while technical/vocational centres offer a practical courses that equip learners with technical/vocational skills for employable skills or education that is career focused (Nidhom, et al., 2025; Makwa et al., 2025)

The various communication patterns in these two educational systems present resources for teachers, students, all classroom participants and other educational stakeholders not only to see and learn the patterns where necessary but to carry out empirical researches on discourse structures where this study has not cover areas such as the multimodal discourse structures in the two educational contexts in Lagos and beyond.

This study explores the use of language in classroom through a comparative discourse analysis framework. It aims at investigating classroom communication discourse with a few to focusing on the discourse patterns prevalent in secondary schools, the discourse strategies in technical and vocational centres and a comparative analysis of these patterns. Student-teacher interactions, the opening and closing strategies, topic and topic managements, turn taking, questions, uses of instructional language and the like. This study seeks to unveil the discourse features that are prevalent in both educational settings and assess their implications for teachers and learners.

This investigation is very significant to educational transformations in the 21st century knowledge and skills acquisitions, competence-focused learning, inclusive education and the need to be able to perform better in the society. This study can inform teacher training, curriculum development and better classroom management, control and strategies in educational contexts.

In addition, every research in secondary and vocational and technical institutions is a research that the results do not only benefit the individuals involved, the schools in particular but the society at large. This is because secondary schools prepare students who are mature to project into their future and vocational and technical educations deal with works and the consumers of the outcomes of the events, activities, performances, lesson, etc.

This research is therefore very significant because it is designed to show the present and possibly the future state of classroom discourse in secondary schools and vocational and technical schools in Lagos with a view to identifying what is obtainable in the present in order to project into the future. It is also meant to make invaluable inputs into teaching and learning of classroom in secondary schools and vocational and technical schools. Students, teachers, instructors and researchers will benefit maximally from this work because of its rich original data and analyses. It will also set a pace for future rigorous investigation into language use in secondary and vocational and technical schools.

The application of appropriate communication strategies will be of tremendous benefits for effective teaching and learning in the secondary schools and in vocational /technical centres and by extension, to the world of works.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Identity the classroom communication strategies in secondary schools;
- Examine the classroom communication patterns in technical and vocational classroom; and
- Compare and contrast the similarities and differences between the classroom discourse in secondary schools and vocational and technical centres?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Secondary school Education

Secondary school education refers to conventional education obtained after primary education. The system of education in Nigeria today allows six (6) years secondary education, three (3) years in Junior Secondary School (JSS) and three (3) years in Senior Secondary School (SSS); at each stage Junior West African Examination Council (WACE) and Senior WAEC are conducted and used as criteria for next high level of academic endeavor.

2.2 Technical and Vocational Centre

Technical education is an educational process that involves the study of technological and related sciences. It focuses on the acquisition of practical skills and technical skills, theoretical training and preparation for industry or higher education. Learners' attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to practical training are necessary in technical education. Vocational education centres also on practical skills such as cooking, plumbing, cosmetology, baking, cooking, etc. It also deals with hand-on training in specific trade and occupation. Both technical and vocation educations are actually practical and prepare learners to be self-employed, after training. There is little or no dividing lines.

Okwori and Mafwalai (2005) give a contrary opinion by observing that there is a dividing line between technical and vocational education and submit that while technical education allows participants to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for work; vocational education provides skills, knowledge and attitude necessary for employment in specific occupation. Even, with this explanation, it is not convincing, does it therefore mean that knowledge, skills and attitude cannot be provided by technical education and the same acquire by vocational education?

Also, Enaharo (2008) attempts to differentiate technical education from vocational education by stating that technical education is the systematic application of scientific or other organized knowledge to practical task while vocational education is education designed to help the learners to acquire and develop skills, knowledge and attributes for effective employments or professions in specific occupations.

Again, Batagarawa (2005) observes that vocational education is a form of specialized education that is directed primarily towards developing competence for employment in a particular occupation. Batagarawa (2005) also states that vocational education equips people with basic skills and competencies to enable them enter and progress in the world of works.

Ikwuegbu (2006) notes that vocational education is one of the potent instruments in the development of individuals and nations. In the same vein, Osayomwanbor and Edokpayi (2008) note that vocational education is a very useful aspect of the educational system because of the occupational content it offers the trainees. They further maintain that it gives the trainees the

opportunity to acquire skills, attitudes, interests and knowledge to socially and economically perform works that are beneficial not only to them; but to the society in general.

2.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse Analysis, a descriptive model for language analyses, is often defined in two ways; one, as a particular unit of language above the sentence and two, as a particular focus on language use. A definition of discourse from a formalist point of view, considers discourse as "sentence" and a definition from the functionalists' point of view considers discourse as "language use". It is worth mentioning that there is a third definition that attempts to bridge the gap between the formalist and the functionalist dichotomy. It tries to highlight the relationship between the formalist and the functionalist points of view. According to Jones (2024) discourse analysis is just the study of language.

Discourse provides a practical approach to the study of every piece of language in use, at all contexts. Its data can be spoken or written, monologic, dialogic or polylogic. Also, it handles the study of how texts are structured in an orderly manner to make meaning and accomplish communicative objectives. According to DE et al., ,(2024), texts are structured in different ways to achieve their purposes.

Also, discourse analysis involves the collection, transcription and analysis of naturally occurring communication interactions, conversations and talks (Johnstone & Andrus 2024; Olbertz-Siitonen, 2024). Usually, the interactions are presented as they occur in natural settings, either by audio, video, audio-video and taping. Naturally occurring data are thereafter transcribed to written or digital form by the researcher prior to the starting of data analysis.

2.3 Classroom discourse

The study of discourse as an approach to linguistic study began to be considered central in linguistics in the early 70s. Discourse analysis is a sub-discipline of linguistics that deals with language use, meaning and context. It offers both structural and functional analyses of any piece of discourse in any social contexts. According to Danielson, et al., (2023) discourse analysis has been "a major area of interest" to discourse participants, researchers and many in other fields of human endeavour.

Classroom Discourse (CD) is a face-to-face interaction between the teacher and his/her students. According to Blook & Pouriran (2009) CD is a special discourse that occurs in classrooms. Cazdens (2001) observes that CD is a central issue in school system because spoken language is the medium by which much teaching takes place. CD is synonymous with classroom teaching and learning. Anana (2015) observes that teaching and learning are the paramount activities carried out in the classroom

Many activities that go on in classrooms are categorized under classroom discourse. CD is synonymous with classroom interaction, and this means the release and acquisition of information and knowledge through teaching and learning processes. Zhang (2008) maintains that classroom interaction plays a crucial part in the process of learning development. Also, CD influences students' behavours and attitudes. Also, negative utilization of classroom discourse may necessitate students to develop negative attitude towards reception of lessons. Every teacher should ensure that he/she employs positive strategy in order to enable the class to be typical in nature.

According to Siddiqui (2005) a typical classroom is made up of students who have varying skills levels and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; it is a classroom where the teachers realise these various aspects of the learners and do everything possible to enable them benefit

maximally from what they pass across to them. The teachers should understand that to effectively impact on the students, teaching and learning should not be separated.

The inseparability of teaching and learning is crucial in secondary schools as well as the technical and vocational centres. Teaching and learning as complementary skills are result-oriented when applied with appropriate communication strategies. It is this complementing nature of teaching and learning that will enhance the classroom participants, especially the students, who are always at the receiving end, to benefit from the lessons.

Teachers' appropriate application or inappropriate application of CD can make or mar student's performance permanently. Teachers are therefore expected to use CD effectively to enhance students' easy comprehension and performance in technical and vocational centres.

2.4 The Teacher as a Model of Classroom Discourse

The teacher is an effective manager of the classroom, and the success or otherwise of every classroom interactions and communication depends on him or her. According to Alasmari,,& Althaqafi, (2004) the teacher needs to practice both "proactive and reactive classroom management strategies" for a successful classroom operations. In addition, Abidin (2025) observes that the effectiveness of classroom management increases students' participations and encourages students more activeness in learning.

Teachers are known to manage the 4m's; these are men, matter, materials and methods. In other words, teachers are all round managers of man important things in schools and outside. Their roles include professional role (official and obligatory), socio-cultural role (academic), aesthetic role (public relation), school planning role (management) and fund raising role. According to Nuha & Musyafa'ah (2023) teachers must be able to manage their classes well.

As a counsellor or a psychologist, a teacher is required to observe the behaviour of the students and once there are problems, he comes in immediately and resolves them. He should also be prepared to assist the parents and his colleagues once there is problem. He should have good interpersonal relations. Besides, he needs to understand himself thoroughly. According to Sundar, & Mesalia, (2023) any teacher can be a counsellor.

There are many teaching techniques as there are teachers. This submission was earlier expressed by Natano et al., (2024) when they observe that there are varied communication patterns that exist in classroom with respect to "public and private speaking". To obtain the desired objectives, the teacher has to select from the available teaching methods and be acquainted with the one that is suitable to the topic, the age of the learner, time and the atmosphere of teaching at a particular point in time. A teacher is expected to master as many strategies of teaching as possible so as to diversify these at different lessons to different learners.

2.5 The Students' Contributions in the Classroom Discourse

It is not only the teachers that solely contribute to the success of classroom discourse, the students also have parts to play in order to ensure that the classroom is conducive for academic activities. In short, without the students' cooperation, participations and engagements, there cannot be any effective classroom discourse. According to Kelly (2007) classroom discourse can involve the participation of students in whole class discussion, and this can enhance easy understanding of these students.

One of the major contributions of the students is to be active listeners. According to Tustonja et al;, (2024) active listening benefits active listeners; once students listen actively, they listen

effectively and able to participate fully in the ongoing discourses. They can comment suggest, jot what is taught, and generally participate and engage in CDs.

Students are also expected to show respect to their teachers. Every student is expected to recognize the asymmetrical positions of the students and the teacher. According to Celkan, & Hussain, (2015), students are obliged to respect their teachers.

Also, students are expected to obey the right or appropriate instructions of their teachers. According to Adika & Dafit (2023) teachers provide "several roles that can support the formation of the character of discipline in students" (655). This includes the assignment and general obedience to good instructions from the teachers.

Every student is expected to be disciplined and dedicated to his/her duties. Students should write assignments, tests and examinations on time and submit them on time. According to Dar & Jan (2023) every student has responsibility for his or her loyal teacher. Other extra-moral duties are also to be done timely.

The attitudes of students to receiving lessons are sacrosanct to their effective participations and engagements in classroom discourses; therefore, cheerful, friendly and diligent dispositions are expected to be exhibited by students in classrooms. According to Akcil & Bastas (2020), attitude can significantly affect students' engagements and learning outcomes.

Above all, punctuality and neatness can contribute positively to ongoing classroom discourse and atmosphere. Where students attain classes late, there are going to miss out. Also, where the environment or they are dirty, these can cause a major physical barrier in the process of teaching and learning.

2.5 Classroom communication strategies

Classroom communication strategies (in this study) are equivalent to various patterns adopted in classroom discourses. The questioning, code-switching, repetitions, rephrasing, use of expressives, informatives, causative, slot-fillers, explanatives, pseudo-elicitations, classroom communication strategies, the teacher-centred pattern, student-student pattern, collaborative and the IRF pattern and many other patterns exist in classrooms.

Considering the crucial role of IRF pattern, Tong, et al., (2024) observe that it enhances "the clarity and flow of communication without altering the meaning or adding supplementary content" (5). According to Gingtings et al., (2025) teachers use a wide range of verbal and non-verbal techniques such as "open-ended questioning, motivational feedback, gestures, and spatial movement more fluently and contextually". They further explain that "these strategies foster higher student engagement and more dynamic classroom interaction" (821).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This is a qualitative research; it draws upon purposefully randomly selected classroom data gathered through observation to compare and contrast secondary school classroom communication strategies with the vocational and technical schools, specifically, the discourse used by the instructors and students in these institutions.

A total of 6104 participants, 4 teachers and 6100 students constitute our sample; two (2) from secondary schools and 100 students from Childlbest, 2000 from Ikorodu Senior Secondary schools, 1500 from Ikorodu Technical College and 2500 from Ikorodu Skill Acquisition Centre).

3.2 Research Instrument

The research instrument adopted in this study is observation. According to Adedokun (2008) observation is used for collecting a direct and firsthand information about events, situations, people or their attributes by selecting and watching the events, situations or people while they manifest the desired behaviours in a particular setting. The main aim of observation is to watch and describe events, phenomena, situations or human behaviours the way they are unfolded or manifested in a natural setting.

Observation can be direct or indirect; direct, where the observer may be at the scene of the information and collect data directly as events, situations, etc. unfold. The observer may use mechanical, electrical or electronic devices to obtain data. He/she may be part of the setting or not. Indirect observation is a method of collecting and recording the needed information by making used of the mechanical aids, electrical or computerized devices. Here, the observer does not need to be present but positions mechanical or computerized devices such as cameras, hidden cameras, automatic counters, etc.

Direct participant observation is very necessary to obtain first-hand information. Here, the observer is said to be a member of the setting in which the observations take place. Data are gathered from both secondary schools and vocational/technical centres in Lagos State.

3.3 Data presentation and Analysis from secondary school

Data from four lessons, two from secondary schools and two from Technical and vocational centres are first presented before their analysis using content analysis as well as Austin (1962)'s *The Speech Act Theory.* Some Jefferson (2008)'s conventional notations are applied in data presentations and analysis. Each utterance is bracketed in either letters or numbers. "T" used in data presentation stands for "Teacher", "I" for Instructor and "S" for student or students.

Again, the abbreviated communication strategies at the end of each presentations from the Technical and Vocational Centres are explained in analysis. "Expl" stands for explanative (s), Elip/ Rep (Elliptical representative(s). "Eli" for elicitation, "Sf" for slot-filler (s), Rep for Representative (s). "Dir" for Directive (s); "Infor," for informatives, "Expr. For expressive(s); "cau" for causative(s) and "uncl" for unclear.

3.3.1. *Excerpts from Christian Religious Knowledge: The Mission and the Growth of the Christian Church*

T: (A1) What is the full meaning of CMS?
S: (A2) ( )
T: (A3) No
(A4)Church Missionary [Society
S: (A5) [Society
T: (A6) and so together with Thomas Freeman
(A7)= They had Christmas service in December ---
December 1842
(A8) =So they came into Nigeria, September 1842
(A9) So in December, Thomas Freeman and Eric
Thompson with other people
(A10)They have [sic] a Christmas service together.
(A11) And I told you that after sometimes Thomas Freeman left for Cape Coast
(A12) and so he left William D' Clark
(A13)=and [his wife] to continue the work=
(A14) [his wife]
(A15) =And I told you that the the the first convert that William D'Clark and his wife had
were how many men
S: (A16) Five men and one <u>women</u> (sic)
T: (A17) woman
(A18) Fine

(A19) Five men and one woman
(A20)And after they were converted,
they were

3.3.2: Data Analysis of "The Mission and the Growth of the Christian Church"

This excerpt comprises classroom communication patterns employed by classroom participants in making discourses successful. (A1) is an elicitation, intending not only to engage students in the ongoing discourses; but to find out the level of knowledge the students have on the subject in question. Again, the students' attempted response in (A2) is not clear; giving possible inference of obvious lack of knowledge about the question, fear of giving wrong answer or lack of intention to reply to what is being asked. One of the inferences is evident in the teacher's response in (A3), where the teacher issued a negation and then gives the answer in (A4).

The teacher response overlaps with the students' interruption (A5). (A6) to (A12) act as representatives. (A13) and (A14) are elliptical representatives employed as delivery mechanisms for continuous delivery. (A15) is an indirect speech; it doubles as an elliptical representative, a false elicitation and a pseudo-representative. The students interpret this as an elicitation and they respond in (A16). The teacher gives a remark on their responses and continues explanatives in (A17) to (A20).

3.3.3. Economics: Historical Development of Money

T: (B1) Trade by batter is a direct exchange
of goods for goods, goods
(B2) Direct exchange of goods for [goods
S: (B3) [goods
T: (B4) = Exchange of goods for foods, goods
for service or services for services
(B5) It is the direct exchange of goods for
goods, foods for services or services for
services (pause)
(B6) Now, before money was introduced
(B7) They system of exchange that was
practised was what ?
T: (B8) = was [trade by batter
S: (B9) [trade by batter
T: (B10) It is, was the system of exchange that
was practised before the introduction
of [money
S: (B11) = [money
T: (B12) Is that clear?
S: (B13) Yes ma
T: (B14) Now this system, the batter system has its
own problems
(B15) There were problems encountered during that
period
(B16) = and that was why the the it was
changed
(B17) = people could not continue using that
system
(B18) Now, let's look at the problems of trade
by batter (pause)
(B19) One of the problems of trade by batter
(B20) = was the problem of double
coincidence of Wants (pauses)
(B21) Now, before exchange could take place
(B22) = under trade by batter system
(B23) Before exchange could take place
(B24) Somebody has to,
(B25) Let's take for instance, somebody wants
to exchange
(B26) He has cow
(B27) Remember, majority of production then
was trade by batter.

3.3.4 Data Analysis on Historical Development of Money

The excerpts from Historical development of Money opens with the teacher in (B1) and (B2) which are expatiatives. This (B2) overlaps with the student's participation in (B3). (B4) and (B5) are emphasizing informatives and explanatives (indirect speech acts). (B5) is also a frame; it complements (B6) which is a clue. (B7) is an elliptical elicitation; and (B8) are replies to the clue in (B9). (B10) is an informative as well as a representative. (B11) is the students' interruptive response. (B12) is a repeated representative and this overlaps with the students' utterance (consessive) in (B11). (B12) and (B13) are interdependent act; interactive pairs.

The instructor applies another strategy in (B14), a re-emphasier, (an emphatic frame) aimed at evaluating the ongoing discourse for clarity and quick understanding by the students. (B15) is informative; (B16) is an additive; (B17) is a representative; (B18) is a directive and (B19) and elliptical representative. Again, he employs an explanative in (20), elliptical representatives, "explicitives" and implicit informatives in (B21) to (B24) and elliptical representatives from (B25) to (B27) in order to explicate the subject matter to the students.

3. 4 Data presentation and Analysis from Technical/ Vocational Centre

3.4.1 Data Presentation from Fashion and Textile: Excerpts from "Cut and Sew")

1. (1) That machine is not good (Expl.)
(2) That Plane is tight (Expl.)
(3) = before 11.00 o'clock (Elip. Rep.)
(4) People way de go that side (Elip. Rep.)
(5) He will still loose it. (Rep.)

S: (6) Tis thing no too long self (Expl.)
(7) Tis you know that there is still space here. (Expl.)

I: (8) Excuse me make I see (Expr.)

S: (9) No Sandra, de do wedding oh! (Expl.)
(10) Uncle, don't eat oh when you are coming.(Expl.)
(11) I said that if you're coming, you should not eat (Expl./ infor)
(12) Food is going to be surplus ( ). (Rep)
(13) Don't cut it so that ( ) (Elip. Rep.)
(14) If it is too short, put it here. (Expl.)
(15) come, come here. (Dir.)
(16) = No , just like you do at the back ( ) (Elip. Rep.)
(17) = but because there is no way, it can come here (cau.)
(18) So, you, go through it here. (Dir.)
(19) = practical drifting or paper work (Elip. Rep.)
(20) = textile and craft (Elip. Rep.)
(21) = tie and die (Elip.Rep.)
(22) = cut and sew (Elip. Rep.)
(23) = Do a temporary stitch (Dir.)
(24) = just a little of it should be too much here (Expl.)
(25) = and not there (Dir.)
(26) = Don't forget that there is just temporary stitch (Expr./ infor)

3.4.2 Data Analysis on "Cut and Sew"

This excerpt opens with an explanative in (1) and closes with an indirect act in (26); the class is highly practical as everyone is busy talking and sewing at the same time. It is not organized as everyone talks sometimes simultaneously.

The locutions in (1) and (2) act as explanatives. (3) and (4) are elliptical representative. (5) is a representative. (6) and (7) are explanatives. (8) is an expressive. (9) and (10) are explanatives. (11) acts both as an explanative as well as an informative. (12) is a representative. (13) is an elliptical representative; (14) is an explanative. (15) is a directive; (16) is an elliptical representative, (17) is the only causative used in this classroom. (18) is a directive; (19) to (22) are elliptical representatives. The instructor refocuses on another subtopic in (23) with a directive and explains what he briefly mentions in (24). (25) is a directive. (26) acts both as an expressive as well as an informative.

A total of 26 free discourse patterns were used and these are further analyzed as 2 informatives, 2 representatives, 4 directives, 8 explanatives, 7 elliptical representatives, 1 expressive, 1 causative Also, a total of 24 speech acts further categorised as 20 direct speech acts, 2 indirect speech acts.

Data Presentation from "ICT" on the Elements of Classroom communication strategies

I :.(1) Design receipt if your system does not have a page maker (Dir.)
(2) = If yours has a page maker, design the school logo (Dir.)
(3) Let me see what you have done (Expr.)
(4) You are creating problems for ( ) yourself (Expr.)
(5) I want to see the work of your handwork. (Dir.)
(6) = whether (uncl.) (Elip. Rep.)
(7) This is a page-maker now (Rep.)
(8) = page maker ( ) (uncl.) (Elip.Rep)
(9) Close all these ones (Dir.)
(10) Please a w( ) (uncl.) (Elip. Rep)
(11) This is it now. (Rep.)
(12) Okay (Elip. Rep.)
S:(13) Sir ( ) (Elip. Rep.)
I: (14) You say what? (Eli)
(15) ehe (Sf)
(16) Arrange words (Dir.)
(17) Shape in words (Dir.)
(18) Yeh what is this (Eli.)
(19) Jef, Jef … ( ) (Elip. Rep)
(20) We no sabi it (Rep.)
(21) Who doesn't know how to design ( ) it?(Eli)
(22)Who pass-worded it? (Eli.)
.
(23) I am not the one that pass-worded it (Rep.)
(24)There are steps involved in designing the logo (Expl.)
(25) Where are the steps involved? (Eli.)
(26) What are the steps involved in designing the logo? (Eli.)
(27) You design letter L (Expl.)
(28) = and then you, design the control under the letter L (Expl)
(29) You write the text for the logo (Expl.)
(30) You do what? (Eli.)
(31) You write the text for the logo (Expl.)
(32) You design the three semi circles in the logo (Expl.)
(33) You design, you design ( ) (Elip. Rep.)
(34) = You add all the necessary features such as colour etc. (Expl.)
(35) = that can be used to define the difference of a characteristic base(Expl.)
(36)You add all the necessary features such as colour etc. (Expl.)
(37) = and group it together (Expl.)
(38) You do what? (Eli.)
(39) Group it to design letter L (Rep.)
(40) How do you design letter L? (Eli.)
(41) You select your rectangle tool. (Expl.)

Data Analysis on "Logo Design"

The excerpt from "*Logo Design*" opens with a directive in (1), as the instructor's illocutionary acts prompt the students to take actions as well as engage fully in the classroom discourse. In addition, two lexical items "system" and "page maker" act as indirect speech acts because of their multiple interpretations ("system may refer to computer set, handset, laptop, desktop or system of the world or other systems). Again, the word. "page-maker" has two possible interpretations, (as an individual who makes a page and as a computer package". The strategy employs in (2) is a directive with embedded indirectness. This pattern is possible of confusing the interpretations especially when applied in isolation.

Again the instructor applies expressives in (3) and (4); (3) also acts as a request and a demand (an indirect speech act) which expresses implicitly the instructor's intentions. The noun, "problems" used in the middle of (4) is the application of indirect locutions as they can represent any forms of unpleasant situations in the world. Other strategies such as a directive in (5) and unclear elliptical representative in (6), a representative in (7) and an unclear elliptical representative in (8) function. The directive in (9), unclear elliptical representative in (10), a representative in (11) all act as direct classroom communication acts.

The application of a possible terminator in (12) indicates the instructor's satisfaction with the compliance and participations of the students in this class. The students concessive in (13) performs

an elliptical representative act thereby making the discourse partially felicitous. This is evident in the instructor's elicitation and slot-filler in (14) and (15)

Besides these, the instructor also uses directives in (16) and (17) to engage the students fully in classroom discourse. Having discovered the students are not fully engaged as he intended, he applies an elicitation in (18) to effect his initial intention (of engaging his students in classroom interactions). The instructor uses an elliptical representative in (19) to request the student to act; and having discovered that the students are not willing to respond, he issues a representative in (20). Still not giving up, the instructor utters elicitations in (21) and (22); yet the students do not respond to it. He later changes his strategies to a representative and an explanative in (23) and (24).

The instructor now opens another transaction by employing an elicitation as a means of introducing a subtopic in (25) and (26). He further explains the steps involved in designing a logo in (27) to the end of the discourse. He also applies explanatives in (27) to (29), elicitation in (30) and a response in (31) and (32) which also act as explanatives. Again, (31) acts as an interdependent speech act because its literal act which is a statement cannot be detached from its secondary act which is an embedded elicitation. In other words, if the emphasis is placed on the words, "You" and "Write" with a question mark at the end of it, the act therefore functions as an elicitation; but if just uttered as it were, then a representative would be used. Locutionary acts (33) to (36) are similar interdependent speech acts; the instructor further employs an elliptical representative in (33), explanative in (34) to (37), an elicitation in (38) and gives self-response in (39); another elicitation in 40 and its interdependent act in (41).

A total of 41 discourse patterns were employed in "*Logo Design*" by in the teacher-student interactions here; these is further divided into 5 representatives, 8 elicitations, 6 directives, 10 explanatives, 1 slot fillers, 2 expressives, 7 elliptical representatives and 2 unclear acts. Again, a total of 38 direct speech acts and 3 indirect speech acts were applied in "*Logo Design*."

3.5 Comparative Analysis of Data

There are similarities of communication discourse patterns used in both secondary and technical and vocational centres in Lagos State. The strategies of explanatives, elliptical representative, directives and the like are applied in these academic settings.

However, there are dissimilarities in the number of strategies applied in both educational setting. Elliptical representatives are predominantly used in technical/vocational centres while directives are employed most in secondary schools.

4. Findings

The analysis reveals that there is partial felicity occasioned by participants' partial understanding of the intentions of the speaker (the teacher). Also, various discourse strategies such as elliptical representatives, explanatives and representatives as predominant discourse patterns and continuous delivery mechanisms that make lessons result-oriented, cooperative, interactive and teacher-focused and they are used mostly in secondary schools. This finding aligns with Ashraf et al, (2024) who observe that classroom communication pattern have a significant effect on secondary schools students; social development in ESL students' interactions. Also, directives make lessons student-centred. The research also revealed the existence of the interdependency or inseparability of direct and indirect speech acts in the two educational settings used in this research.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Classroom discourse patterns are indispensable strategies in classroom discourses at all levels. This study was a comparative discourse study of the communication patterns in selected secondary schools and technical/vocational centres in Lagos State, Nigeria. Using Austin (1962)'s *The Speech Act Theory* as its analytical framework and content analysis, the study demonstrates how classroom discourses are shaped by discourse patterns. Utterances of all sorts are samples of various strategies employed by classroom participants.

The findings revealed that indirect speech acts dominant classroom communication patterns in secondary schools thereby making the teaching and learning teacher-centred while in technical/ vocational classes, directives are the predominant communication strategies. The implication of this is that lessons become student-centred and ideal for 21st century education. Secondary school is academically structured while technical/vocational centres are practically structured for technical skills and skill acquisition for job and career purposes. The cooperative and participatory communication strategies employed mostly in vocational/ technical centres enhance students' full engagement, practical training and skill development.

In addition, the study demonstrates the importance of direct, indirect and interdependent speech acts in fostering positive and result-oriented educational processes in both academic settings. According to Anana (2018), a direct speech act is made up of only one act. The indirect speech act is an implied act that contains more than one act; the interdependency of both direct and indirect act is therefore their inseparability.

The study therefore recommends that directives, collaborative/interactive discourse strategies be employed by classroom discourse participants with a view to promoting practical pedagogy, inclusive participation and students' full engagements; and bridging the lacuna between theory driven education and practical-driven education. By so doing, there would be a balance in academic systems. Teachers, students, policy makers and other education stakeholders should integrate an engaging and inclusive student-centred strategies into classroom discourses in Lagos State and beyond.

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POST-MALE DOMINATION AND INTRA-FEMINIST RESISTANCE: ILLUSTRATIONS FROM SELECTED NARRATIVES OF THE URHOBO PEOPLE

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Abstract
This study is an analysis of intra-feminist resistance in a post-gender equality struggle period. Feminist resistance is well documented in pre-colonial literature of Africa. The performers of Urhobo narratives even go further than just portraying the feminist resistance to male domination to providing futuristic models of the post-male domination resistance time when women would have achieved equality with men in political, economic and social spheres of human existence. In the analysis of the two models chosen for this study –The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives and The Virtuous Wife stories, the paper argues that in the eventuality of the attainment of power by women, there is still feminist resistance; this time it is intra-feminist resistance. Adopting cultural studies as a framework, the paper discovers that through the motifs of inequality, incompatibility, struggle, division and revolution, the intra-feminist resistance in the post-male dominance period still lead to either peaceful or violent change in leadership. As the narrators grapple with these themes, they objectified their models with the techniques of parallelism, mask, magic realism and symbolism to show that in the reign of women, the major antagonists are also women. The study concludes that women are the major challenge to the successful attainment of the reign of the woman and that feminist resistance will be a continuous struggle.
Keywords: domination, feminist, incompatibility, intra-resistance, revolution.

Introduction

This paper interrogates the post-gender equality struggle and feminist resistance; the struggle to resist the whims and caprices of women in position of power by other female followers. As the struggle for gender equality and that of overthrowing the patriarchal system gains traction, some women have been able to rise to the pinnacle of positions hitherto occupied by men. The crux of the issue is that once these women have attain power, the management of such powers and their relationship with fellow women have not been subjected to intensive academic scrutiny. This is the focus of this study. Since most studies have focused on masculinity and the ways women are resisting patriarchy, it is imperative that the post-struggle feminist narrative of the management of the leader-followers relationship amongst women should also be investigated. This paper therefore, foregrounds the fact that one of the most pressing challenges facing the women is their ability to negotiate the murky waters of women interpersonal relationship in both family and the public space.

The literary canon has not been favourable to the woman; it is dominated by men's work. Moreover, the female characters projected in most stories are women who play subservient roles. This male dominated canon and characterization is not limited to one culture. Therefore, the need to refute the subjugation of women is universal. One of the major conflicts between male and female writers rests on the denigration of the female by the male in both the number of works accepted into the cannon and the picture of complete submissiveness and near absence of 'strong' female characters in the work of most male writers. This bias stand has relegated the achievements of women over the years to the shadows. This in turn, has led to the struggle for female affirmative consciousness. The necessity to refute the stigma of subjection of women in male literary works is not limited to written literature but also finds an outlet in the oral arts Bressler (2003) refers to this as the "false standards and beliefs about women, both in their lives and in their portrayal in literature" (141/144). The urge by female content creators to compose feminist stories or themes in tales is geared towards demystifying male domination. This adheres to the trend left by Elaine Showalter's strand of feminism called gynocriticism.

In Africa, the work of Davies (1990) seems to re-negotiate the balance of Showalter's stance when related to African tales. Davies argues that "the available research makes it clear there was equal billing for male and female in the oral literary tradition and that while there was specialization in certain genres according to gender; there was no large scale exclusion of one group from the creative process" (2). This is in contrast with the male dominated literary canon which excludes most women's works. As a result of this fact, Robinson (1994) notes that "an already recognized woman author has been denied her rightful place, presumably because of the general devaluation of female efforts and subject" (155). This line of thought forms the basis of the study by Sakshi Semwai (2022) where he investigated "what accounts for the eventual shift from minimal roles of women in *Things Fall Apart* to central roles in *Americanah*" (307). According to Semwai, "in early African fiction, the narrative of the woman is mostly that of a second-class citizen … in this masculine world, wife is ranked with other property" (307).

In portraying the female character as undergoing restructuring from being treated as part of household objects in Achebe early novels to its present status of an independent character in the modern African novels, the bane of the woman as represented in those novels is the patriarchy or masculinity. This is what Eida Hungwe and Chipo Hungwe (2010) describe as the "problematic of the African tradition of masculinity which fosters the marginalization and subordination of women …." (3). In detailing the stance of Achebe in his novel, *Anthills of the Savannah*, the Hungwes argues that "Achebe acknowledges that the malaise Africa is experiencing results from excluding women from the scheme of things" (3). In presenting the utopian picture of the woman, Achebe's vision, according to the Hungwes, "is the inclusion of all social classes in matters of the state with women on the forefront on the road to freedom" (4). In so doing, the men "are presented as a fragmented lot who jostle each other to win favor … against the preferable scene of women in solidarity" (4). Thus, in the view of the Hungwes, in the preceding period before the attainment of power, the women are united while their traducers, the men, are at each other's neck.

The Hungwes success in portraying the figure of women in solidarity is limited to the period of the struggle for gender equality. But what happens to the women when they finally succeed in attaining power. The Hungwes do not explain. This is what this paper is set out to achieve. This paper uses the postcolonial studies to argue that once women attain power to govern a nation or an entity, women become the major challenge of the woman in achieving the glorious equality they seek. It is observed that most times, the relationship between female leaders and female followers is messier than that between women and the opposite gender. In this regard, there is a noticeable resistance between the women in the followers group and the woman at the helms of affair. This situation is further complicated when there is rivalry and competition for a position of importance between two or more women. In these situations, the reactions of women as they struggle for and resist each other are a fascinating area for content creators and critics. In portraying the divisiveness of women once they attain power, this study draws illustrations from two models preserved in the oral narratives of the Urhobo people. The two stories are *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*

(Avwebo and Avwierovwe) performed by Mrs. Sarah Abohweyere of Olomu and *The Virtuous Wife* narrated by Mr. Cousin Onofekohwo of Kokori. Both stories are narrated in the Urhobo language.

The Urhobo people are found in the Delta Central senatorial district of Delta State, Nigeria. They share a common boundary with the Benin people; this allows them to share both ideas and goods. G. G. Darah recorded the stiry *Avwebo and Avwierovwe*, which is translated as *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives* as part of his scholarly research work. In Urhobo marital relations, the word "Avwierovwe" refers to a disrespected or neglected wife and "Avwebo" means a favoured wife. The plot of the story is developed on the folk conflict and antagonism that the two names connote. The story is about the unhealthy rivalry amongst the numerous wives of a king in a large, fictional town in the ancient Benin Kingdom. The story deals with the intrigues and domestic schisms engaged in by members of the Oba's (King) household and it ends with the triumph of a section. Metaphorically, the design of the tale also details the harsh experiences of Avwierovwe in the hands of her mate Avwebo and her rise from obscurity to importance and the reverse for Avwebo. At the same time, the story is a representation of the recurrent disunity among those in power and their followers. It should be noted that in Urhobo story tradition, the Tortoise motif evokes images of tricksterism, greed and selfishness.

The second story, *The Virtuous Wife*, is a thirty minutes story performed by Cousin Onofekohwo. The story is about the internal struggles and squabbles in the pre-Oranmiyan Benin Empire. This is the era of the Ogiso (King) dynasty. This particular King is polygamous. The struggle among the wives for dominance, knowing that the Kingship is primogeniture in pattern leads to malicious intent and murder. Inarhe, the eldest wife connived with Tortoise, a power broker in the kingdom to murder Jateme the second and most virtuous wife of the King. Still bent on eliminating Omovodjotu, the only son of Jateme and the heir apparent, Inarhe and her cronies met their waterloo, when Jateme resurrects to lead a revolution. Both King, Inarhe and their cohorts died in the putsch and Omovodjotu is installed as the next king. Therefore, the tale can be interpreted as the struggle between the ruling class and the dominated class. The choice of both tales is influenced by their length, complex plot and the need to capture the subjective effect of the idiosyncratic characterization by the narrators as it reflects on the idea of intra-feminist resistance. The model of women in power designed by the two narrators of the selected stories enables the analyst to contrive a utopian environment of the post-struggle for equality. The resulting friction among the leaders of the revolution and women followers which leads to a counter-revolution propels the analyst to the realization of his argument that the change in the leadership structure of an entity from men to women does not lead to a lull in feminist resistance.

Resisting the Other in Oral Narratives

In Urhobo tale's cosmogonic sphere, several figures of women are identifiable. There is the aristocratic class of women. This group is dominated by women who are overtly ambitious and, in most times, act as power brokers in the society. Then, there is what Propp (1968) refers to as the 'helper' in the form of Old Woman (*mama, nene* or *omomare*) figure. This image depicts an old woman who has experience in socio-political issues. In the two stories under consideration, the method of analysis establishes the idiosyncratic interest of each narrator as objectified in the narratives. Then, as the interest of the protagonists and antagonists of the stories, and that of the performer play out, the analyst is opportune to subject these to critical experimentation, compared and contrast them, and deductions are made. The first comparative factor in the two tales is that both stories project accomplished women as astute state administrators who assist the King in the fictional kingdoms. The King in *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives* is so pleased with the stability in the kingdom that he leaves the day-to-day running of the kingdom in the hands of Avwebo (his favoured wife among the royal harem). Avwebo takes this advantage and with the assistance of Tortoise and others in the government becomes the de-facto ruler of the kingdom. In the other story, *The Virtuous Wife*, the King is supported by Inarhe, the eldest wife. Once again, Tortoise is among those assisting in the enactment and implementation of the royal court's decisions.

Apart from these characters, there are other women in the stories. In the *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, there is Avwierovwe, one of the many wives of the King. There is also an old woman, and later in the story, Ubiurumagbe, the daughter of Avwierovwe appears in the story. In *The Virtuous Wife*, there is Jateme, the second wife of the king and the women ancestors who assisted her later in the story. In these instances, there is the use of parallelism in the presentation of Avwebo and Inarhe as aristocratic while Avwierovwe and Jateme are portrayed as ordinary women. Therefore, a paradox is established whereby Avwebo who is considered aristocratic and ambitious is pitted against Avwierovwe, a noble woman; and, Jateme, an exemplary wife is paralleled against Inarhe, an oligarch. The principled portrayal of Avwierovwe and Jateme enable the analyst to understand the role of these women in political matter. Their loyalty to constituted authority is overwhelmingly contrasted with the duo of Inarhe and Avwebo's lust for power. This establishes the conflict between the two groups in the narratives.

It is pertinent to observe that Avwebo and Inarhe as women could not choose other women as colleagues in the administration of the kingdom. Instead, they find political adviser and tactician in the person of Tortoise. In Urhobo tales, through anthropomorphism, narrators usually mask the image of sycophancy and betrayal in Tortoise; he is also presented as a male character. Another angle to the complexity surrounding the involvement of Tortoise is that Tortoise is an executive member of the King's administrative council. He is ably portrayed as Minister of Information or in a dictatorial setting, a propagandist. But in this scenario, instead of Tortoise reporting to his boss, the King, he usually waits on Avwebo or Inarhe in both tales respectively.

The Concept of Incompatibility

In highlighting the conflict between the two groups of women, the motif of incompatibility is objectified. The narrators of the tales take the advantage of the idea of incompatibility in advancing the notion of the inability of women with different ideologies to exist together. According to Osakwe (2002), incompatibility in literary stylistics refers to "set of item where the choice of one excludes the use of all the other items from that set" (14). In the tales under analysis, several women figures are presented by the two narrators. However, in their categorization, a sense of incompatibility occur when a woman is projected as Avwebo (favoured wife) and another as Avwierovwe (disrespected wife) in *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives* tale; and the ambition of Inarhe is pitted against the reserved nature of Jateme in *The Virtuous Wife* story. In the indigenous semantic understanding of marital parlance, the term Avwebo or Inarhe connotes exclusiveness, especially in a polygamous setting like the King's harem. So, labeling one wife as Avwebo or Inarhe necessarily excludes the other women in the royal house. Moreover, naming one wife Avwierovwe or the virtuous wife excludes all other wives as overtly over-ambitious women. Therefore, the idea incompatibility enables the narrators to inculcate in the psyche of the audience the fact that Avwebo and Inarhe on the one side, and Avwierovwe and Jateme are incompatible nor will they be able to co-exist, thus setting the stage for the eventual conflict and intra-feminist resistance that engulf everybody in the tales.

Intra-feminist Struggle

In order to capture the intra-feminist struggle in a post-gender equality setting, the narrators use the idea of disunity to connect the audience to the sequence of events in the stories. In the *Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, the schism between the two groups of women is established when Avwierovwe decides to abjure the status-quo in which Avwebo and her cronies are enjoying as the only dominant force in the kingdom. In rejecting the admission into the cabal, Avwebo and the King acting on Tortoise's advice confined and silenced Avwierovwe. The narrator explains the situation this way:

> The Oba (King) asked the latest wife, "What is your name?"
> She said, "Avwierovwe" (An Unfavoured wife)…
> The Oba asked in surprise, "You, so beautiful, are you Avwierovwe?"
> She confirmed it so.

Tortoise heard and said, "Avwierovwe is her name, *ehen*, then show her the attitude meant for Avwierovwe."
Then, they locked the door of the kitchen (laughter).
They built a house for the woman; they built it near the toilet, where excreta are passed…
They told her to move into the house.

In this situation of obscurity, Avwierovwe is removed from the scheme of things in the palace; she is abandoned and alienated. But in this state of depression, a slave boy in the palace who is also discontented with the abuse of absolute power by Avwebo (favoured wife) arranges for Avwierovwe to meet the King in the nuptial chamber, a preserve for only Avwebo. In order to achieve this feat, Avwierovwe has to be disguised as Avwebo. Avwierovwe's successful outing with Avwebo's disguise invokes suspicion on the part of Avwebo, and being the favoured wife, she wants to know who slept with the King the previous night. This is natural, since most nights she always shares the bed with the King. But it is also unnatural since the King is supposed to be entitled to all his wives. The significance of this part of the narrative is that while Avwebo, the powerful female ruler is keeping tabs on the male as the probable source of threat to her lordship, it is her fellow woman who has started the coup that will remove her from power.

In the other story, the split in women's solidarity materializes when Inarhe (the favoured wife) is projected as the mother of deformed children. In contrast, Jateme (the virtuous but unfavoured wife) is childless. According to the narrator, the schism between the two women started this way:

As for Inarhe (the favoured wife), her advice to the husband is what he always adhere to.
Jateme (the virtuous but unfavoured wife) was the only presentable wife of the man that can escort him to any occasion.
She has diverse personality and good conduct.
Not knowing that in the marriage,
Since Jateme came into the family compound
Her mates have been envious of her.
The worst was Inarhe
Inarhe has about nine children in the compound
But none of the children is useful.

In this scenario, the conflict between the two women, though covert, is simmering. The division is further heightened when Jateme gave birth to a boy child who is unequivocally the heir apparent.

As things begin to fall apart, the narrators employ the motif of revolution to portray the climax of the schism between the women in the stories. Certain events uncontrollably lead to the bloody change in the status-quo. In the story of the *Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, Avwierovwe uses the disguise of Avwebo to sleep with the King. The result is the birth of a baby girl named Ubiurumagbe. Through the effort of the slave boy, the knowledge of the birth of the child is concealed from Avwebo. This is because, Avwebo is barren and any news of the birth of a child for the King by another woman will be considered a treasonable offence. In these dangerous times, the child, Ubiurumagbe, begins to ask questions about her identity. At the end, through the technique of masking, the child is reconciled to the King. With the introduction of Ubiurumagbe as the heir apparent, the major conflict is revealed. It is the struggle for power between conservatives led by Avwebo and Tortoise and the progressives led Avwierovwe, the Old Woman and the Slave boy.

The same situation is obtained in *The Virtuous Wife* story. After the birth of the male child, Omovodjotu, Inarhe became restless, deflated, furious and unpredictable. She bewitched and killed Jateme. Thereafter, she began to torment the heir apparent, Omovodjotu. An opportunity presented itself when the King married a new wife. Inarhe demanded for sacrificial offerings to be provided by each of the King's children for welcoming the new wife, the failure of which is to be punished with the death penalty. Omovodjotu who has no one to provide for him looked up to his father for

protection. But Inarhe barred the King from providing for any of his sons. In this dreadful scenario, Omovodjotu goes to his mother grave to cry for assistance. Mysteriously, there is provision from the world of ancestors. The boy repeatedly goes to the grave to cry and the mother delivers fowls, goats, rams and bulls for him. In spite of these, Inarhe demanded for the audit of the King's wives. Any child whose mother is not alive is to be sacrificed. Omovodjotu went to his mother's grave and cried for seven days. In representing these events, the narrator of *The Virtuous Wife* story resorts to the technique of magical realism when he miraculously links Omovodjotu with her dead mother. The story continues:

> **Narrator**: Immediately he stopped uttering these words.
> The child talked to his mother.
> The mother did not respond.
> The mother then summoned those with her in the ancestral world.
> She said, "You saw how I was bewitched to meet you here; are they still determined to send my son to meet me here? Can you give me some time-off so that I can take the fight to the family on earth?
> As for her guardians in the spirit world, they granted her request.
> She said to her son, "Give way".
> The child gave way.
> When he gave way, the grave tore *ghrwo-oooo.*
> She rose from the dead.
> She wore flowing white linen from head to toe *vouiii.*
> She rendered a tune.
> She called her son, "Son, don't get close to me, just follow the path", while she was leading the song….

Jateme resurrects from the dead and leads a campaign that resulted in the putsch that sweeps out Inarhe and the King from power.

In the *Favoured and the Unfavoured* story, the narrator tied the idea of revolution to the resolution of the conflict of the story. Immediately Avwebo is brought to speed about the existence of Ubiurumagbe, the daughter of Avwierovwe and heir apparent, she schemes with Tortoise to have the child killed in a mysteriously way. Avwebo instigated Tortoise to tell the Oba that the oracle, the mouth piece of the gods and a source of intelligence report has discovered that Ubiurumagbe's destiny is to kill the Oba. A special tribunal convenes to try Ubiurumagbe for treason. When all are seated, the King asked Tortoise and Avwebo that:

> "Who consulted the oracle?"
> They (Avwebo and Tortoise) answered, "It is an oracle."
> They (the Oba's (King's) council) asked further, "Was it in this town belonging to the Oba?" They answered in the affirmative.
> "Go bring the diviner", they directed. "Bring the diviner so he can consult the oracle", they ordered.
> Tortoise said he could consult the oracle and the court agreed, saying: "This is even a quicker solution".
> They urged Tortoise to cast the lots. Tortoise brought out the lots and hit them *ko-ko-ko-ko-ko-ko-ko-ko.* He invoked the powers of the oracle thus: "Oba's daughter Ubiurumagbe, said she would cause the father's death. My oracle, is it the forecast?" *Ghwra-aaaaa*, he casts the seedlings.
> The oracle said, "It is not true"
> Confused, Tortoise retorted, "Are you dreaming."
> He resumed the casting process…. At this point, Avwebo exclaimed: "Ha, Tortoise, you don't know how to cast lots again. This was not how you cast them the other time."

> "You come and cast them yourself. Avwebo said she knew how to cast lots. Did we even cast lots?" Tortoise said angrily.
> "Were you not the one who came to me to say that the destiny of Ubiurumagbe would lead to the father's death?"

When the supreme council of the land demanded Tortoise to cast the lots as he is a notable fortune teller, he is not able to get the dubious result in the presence of other experts. Thus, the narrator uses magic realism to tie the sub-plots of the tale into a whole without the audience discovering or questioning her artistry.

The significance of the use of magic realism in the overthrow of the conservatives and the resolution of the plot of the stories is that it helps to disable the audience's inquisitive faculty. This conforms to the words of Broderick (1977) that "it is the denial of beliefs that gives the art form its freshness, its spontaneity and its entertainment appeal besides reinforcing the ethical codes of the people and at the same time protecting its survival from one generation to the other" (224,225). Apart from the above application, magical realism also enables the narrators to project magical orality in the capture, suspense and dispense of the audience in a storytelling performance. This means that man, always fascinated by the unknown is always at the mercy of the elements of nature. Therefore, when a storyteller merges the natural realism with the meta-physical fantasies in a story, the result is absolute concentration and denial of what is real on the part of the audience and at the same time the narrative will not lead to a state of confusion.

The rivalry and antagonism generated by the two groups of women in a post-struggle for gender equality period is geared towards the argument that in the time when women have finally achieved the gender equality that they seek, the major resistance will not come from the men but it will be spearheaded by the women against their kind. In portraying this futuristic setting, the narrators of the two stories present change as a major idea that advances the plot of the story. As the events play out, the impunity of Avwebo and her group in *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives* and Inarhe with hers in *The Virtuous Wife* make the eventual putsch inevitable. This is another area of convergence in the two tales. In *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, the palace revolution is spearheaded by Ubiurumagbe, the daughter of Avwierovwe with the help of some elements who are underlings in the drama of Avwebo's control of political, economic and social powers. In *The Virtuous Wife* the revolt is championed by Jateme, the dead wife who was killed by Inarhe and her agents. She resurrects and with the uncommon support from the ancestors, possibly women ancestors (*Eghweya*), undertakes a political and spiritual cleansing of the empire. The point being made here is that both group of women are ambitious and are prepared to sacrifice everything they have to hold on to the existing balance of political power or to change the status-quo and acquire power for themselves.

The idiosyncrasies of the performers come to the fore when their bias and emotions necessitate them to inject some significant change in the outcome of the intra-gender conflict in the two stories. In *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives,* the narrator presents Avwebo as a barren woman. In fact, all the Oba's wives are barren except Avwierovwe. But in *The Virtuous Wife*, the male performer did not present Inarhe as an unfruitful woman. Instead she has stereotypic children. It is in this atmosphere of the inability of these 'first ladies' to produce heir apparent to the throne in a primogeniture setup that the narrators take advantage of to insert the other women who both give birth to wonderful kids. In *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, Avwierovwe, the disrespected wife gives birth to a girl, Ubiurumagbe, while in the tale of *The Virtuous Wife* by a male narrator, Jateme, the irreprehensible wife gives birth to Omovodjotu, a boy.

The Resolution

The divergence in the gender of the heir apparent is in furtherance of the narrators' plan to facilitate the resolution of the plot at the end of the tale. The narrator of *The Favoured and Unfavoured Wives*, Mrs. Sarah Abohweyere shares her feminist attitude when she unveils the heir apparent as a girl. But, Chief Cousin Onofekohwo, a male narrator, conscious of the rapid rise of

Inarhe in the political equation of the kingdom, therefore chooses the heir apparent as a male. This conflict of interest between the two performers reflects the continuation of the struggle for women affirmative action in the exercise of political power and scholarship. But for the male performer, there is need to create awareness that women have acquired power but are unable hold on to it due to intra-gender schism and so there is the need to keep them in check.

However, the female narrator of will have none of the change of the gender at the top. Therefore, she depicted the heir apparent as a woman and at the same time, Avwierovwe, the mother of the heir apparent survives the putsch in spite of all the maltreatment, torment and bashing at the hands of Avwebo. More so, the narrator caused a stir when the Oba (King) survives the dethronement of Inarhe and her political cronies. The question is, why put Ubiurumagbe, the female heir apparent under the image of her father, the Oba when the opportunity to dethrone the Oba and Avwebo presents itself unobstructed as the male narrator of *The Virtuous Wife* did when both Inarhe and the King died in the violent seizure of power? Several factors may account for this. The tale was narrated in the eighties. At that time, the fever of feminist ideas is enveloping the Nigerian urban society. Secondly, the removal of the Oba without any man to replace him would have spell doom for the lineage of the King as the citizens may resist the enthronement of the girl, Ubiurumagbe as their new King. So, to achieve balance, the narrator goes for the option of replacing Avwebo with Avwierovwe at the royal court assisted by Ubiurumagbe to act as check against the male power brokers.

Likewise, the same feat is achieved by the male narrator of *The Virtuous Wife* when he resurrects Jateme from the dead to lead the revolution. At the end of the tale, there is no record of the fact that Jateme returned to her ancestors. Thus, Omovodjotu, after becoming King is left in the hands of her powerful, magically and spiritually fortified mother, who in fact, will be the de-facto ruler. It is pertinent to remember that in the story, Omovodjotu has been unable to independently cater for his needs and challenges since the demise of his mother. The argument here is that the male characters that are at the helms of affair or the heir apparent are portrayed as dependent on the women in the story either as their wife, partner or mother. This realistic portrayal goes to solidify the notion that women will continue to struggle to be influential in power politics whether they are in power or out of it.

On a deeper meaning, in the two stories, the images of Avwebo and Inarhe represent the oligarch in power bent on perpetrating their interest and the status quo. The Avwierovwe or Jateme groups are the people clamoring for change to a new order. This is in line with the argument of this paper that in the post-struggle for gender equality scenario when women are in power, the resistance will be between the women as the women will be part of the controllers of powers of the state and, at the same, it is the women too who will engineer the change that may follow. This is what is projected in *The Virtuous Wife* story when the narrator reduces Omovodjotu to a follower who paced after Jateme his mother, who with powers endowed on her, marches ahead to carry out the revolution. The representation of the female gender as winning the struggle for gender equality, taking over the powers of state as de-facto rulers, and also, becoming the eventual champions of the revolution for a better political system is the hallmark of the projection of women on both sides of the socio-political divide as portrayed by the narrators of the two stories used for illustration.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of the two tales has buttressed the argument that women are major contributors to the political stability of the state through their resistance to absolute male or female subjection and subjugation. As the woman in the twenty-first century Africa have acquired the tools of education, universal collaboration and a heightened sense of purpose procured from the feminist movement, they will continue to work in tandem with their ancestral colleagues who overcame male dominance and affirm their female consciousness in socio-political spheres as presented in the African oral literature models. Therefore, it becomes imperative for the new woman in Africa to balance their urge for political power with a positive, cooperative, and supportive attitude devoid of schism and intra-gender struggle

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EQUIPPING THE BRIDE, SUSTAINING THE FAMILY: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF *ÍDŪ ỤLỌ* IN ECONOMIC CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN CONTEMPORARY IGBO SOCIETY

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Abstract:
In traditional Igbo society, the practice of Ídū Ụlọ the ceremonial gifting of household items, foodstuffs, and domestic animals by the bride's family to their daughter at marriage, is more than a cultural formality. It functions as an indigenous economic strategy designed to ensure the stability of the new home and mitigate economic tensions that may lead to conflict. This research explores Ídū Ụlọ not merely as a customary rite, but as a deliberate economic assemblage that fosters resilience, encourages wealth redistribution, and promotes peace between kinship networks. In the 21st century, where economic instability has become a major source of family disintegration and marital disputes, this rite offers a localized model of pre-emptive conflict management rooted in cultural values. Drawing from oral interviews, ethnographic fieldwork, and indigenous knowledge frameworks, the study will investigate the evolution of this rite in both rural and urban Igbo contexts. It aims to uncover how this practice has adapted to modern realities and how it continues to serve as a tool for economic empowerment, gendered support systems, and inter-family cohesion. By critically reinterpreting Ídū Ụlọ rite through the lens of indigenous conflict resolution and economic anthropology, this project offers new insights into the sustainability of traditional institutions in the contemporary African societies. Ultimately, the research advocates for a deeper recognition of some of the Igbo cultural practices as viable models for economic security and social harmony in family life today.

Key Words: *Ídū Ụlọ* Igbo Marriage Customs, Economic Conflict Management, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Family Stability.

Introduction

In Igbo society, marriage is not merely a union between two individuals; it is a communal and economic alliance between two extended families. One of the most culturally significant elements of this alliance is the practice of *Ídū Ụlọ* a traditional rite whereby the bride's family equips their daughter with essential household items, food crops, and domestic animals as she transitions into her husband's household. Often regarded as a symbolic gesture of love and responsibility, this rite is in fact a deliberate economic intervention that has long served to stabilize the new home and reduce the likelihood of future conflict. Customarily, it provides the bride with the material means to begin her domestic life with dignity and self-reliance. Items such as cooking utensils, grinding stones, yams, livestock, farm implements, crop seedlings and woven materials serve as both practical resources and symbols of economic empowerment. It is a manifestation of the Igbo communal ethic of *onye aghala nwanne ya* (no one should abandon his kin), where the welfare of the woman in her new home is seen as the responsibility of her natal family. By providing these resources, the bride's family contributes to economic balance in the marital home, pre-empting dependency-related tensions, especially in times of hardship.

However, in the wake of globalization, urbanization, and changing family structures, traditional practices like the rite of *Idu Ụlọ* are facing reinterpretation, decline, or outright neglect. The modern economy has introduced new pressures that threaten the sustainability of indigenous systems of family support and conflict prevention. Yet, economic instability remains one of the leading causes of marital strife, domestic violence, and family breakdowns in Igbo society today. This study, therefore, seeks to re-evaluate this rite as more than a cultural artifact, as a functional economic model for conflict prevention and household stability. By exploring its traditional significance, contemporary adaptations, and socio-economic implications, this research aims to highlight the enduring relevance of this rite of passage as Igbo indigenous practices in navigating modern challenges. In contemporary Igbo society, rising economic hardship, urban migration, and the erosion of traditional values have contributed significantly to increased marital tension, family instability, and economic conflicts within households. While much scholarly attention has been given to bride price (*ìmé ngwú* or *ìmé ego*), little focus has been placed on *Idu Ụlọ* - the indigenous practice whereby a bride's family equips her with essential household goods, food items, and livestock as part of the marriage process.

Traditionally, it served as an economic cushion and a peacebuilding mechanism, ensuring that the new bride had sufficient material resources to contribute meaningfully to her new home, thereby reducing early dependence, financial disputes, and tensions. However, in today's socio-economic landscape, this practice is being diminished, commercialized, or even discarded altogether, often under the pressure of modern lifestyles, individualism, and Western marriage ideals. As a result, many families have lost access to an indigenous framework that once fostered economic resilience, gendered support systems, and conflict prevention within marital unions. The absence of such traditional support mechanisms is contributing to the growing crisis of domestic instability and economic incompatibility in marriages across Igbo communities. Yet, there is a dearth of academic research exploring how the practice of this rite can be critically examined, revitalized, or reimagined to meet the realities of the 21st century.

This study is therefore driven by the urgent need to investigate *Idu Ụlọ* as a culturally embedded economic practice, with the potential to serve as a model for conflict management and sustainable family development. It asks: what happens to the economic balance of marital homes when such indigenous practices are weakened or lost? And how can it be re-integrated or transformed to address present-day challenges within Igbo society?

Literature Review

Works written by renowned scholars were reviewed to give credit and justification to this article.

Idu Ụlọ

This is a rite of passage in Igbo culture that herald the sending forth of a bride by her kith and kins to her husband's house. It is an Igbo traditional marriage custom where the bride's family provides her with property, household items, foodstuffs, and sometimes livestock to take along to her husband's home. The term literally means **"**setting up a home**"** (*Idu* = to establish/settle, *Ụlọ* = home). It is done after the bride price and other marriage rites have been completed. Items given may include cooking utensils, furniture, clothing, jewellery, yams, palm oil, goats, and other necessities to help the bride start life in her new home. It is not just material but also symbolic - it shows the bride's family's love and continued connection to her, ensuring that she has dignity, respect, and some measure of independence in her husband's house.

Different scholars have various views about *Ídū Ụlọ* yet expressing similar opinions. Base on that, Isidienu (2016:134) refer to *Ídū Ụlọ* as Bride Present, which is a seal of marriage and is very symbolic. She asserts that "It gives the wife dignity in her marital home. It is the first early items by which she starts a new life in her husband's house. It shows that her parents appreciate her and the items cannot be removed without her permission." Mbiti (1969) refers to *Ídū Ụlọ* as Marriage gift. It is the symbols of marriage bond or covenant. They are the legal instruments which authorize the husband and the wife to live together. Kenez (2013) cited by Isidienu (2016) submits that *Ídū Ụlọ* known as Bride Wealth is the property that a bride's/wife's family gives to their daughter as she is escorted to the husband's home upon marriage; it includes all culinary utensils and farm seedlings that a young wife needs to start playing the roles and duties of a married woman. Culturally, *Ídū Ụlọ* strengthens kinship ties, reduces early economic conflict in marriage, and promotes family stability. Gennep (1960), made us to understand that a rite of passage is a socially recognized ritual that marks an individual's transition from one life stage or social status to another. In the Igbo cultural context, bride property assemblage functions as such a rite of passage. It symbolizes the movement of a woman from daughterhood in her natal family to wifehood in her husband's household. The provision of domestic property - such as utensils, furniture, clothing, and farm tools, not only equips her materially for her

new role but also ritually legitimates her incorporation into her husband's lineage. This process reflects what Turner (1967) describes as the three stages of passage: separation (leaving her natal home), liminality (the preparation and presentation of property), and incorporation (her acceptance into the new family). Thus, bride property assemblage is both a material and symbolic practice that secures the bride's transition and the community's recognition of her new social identity.

Ídū Ụlọ often referred to as *bride property assemblage*, is a significant aspect of Igbo traditional marriage rites. Uchendu, (1965), opines that this rite involves the bride's family equipping her with essential household items, food crops, and sometimes domestic animals as she transitions into her husband's home. Scholars like Amadiume, (1987), emphasizes that *Ídū Ụlọ* is more than symbolic; it is a material foundation for marital stability and an expression of the natal family's continued investment in their daughter's wellbeing. Through this rite of passage, the bride maintains dignity in her new household, while her natal family reinforces inter-family solidarity.

Moving further, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde, (1950), observe that the institution of marriage in African societies has long served as a socio-economic, cultural, and political arrangement that goes beyond the union of individuals to encompass kinship networks and community interests. In Igbo culture, marriage is a multilayered institution governed by customs and practices that include bride price (ìmé ǹgwú or ìmé ego) and *Ídū Ụlọ* the latter being a domestic provisioning ceremony whereby the bride's family equips her materially for her new life. Ottenberg (1958); Nzegwu, (2006), note that while much of the literature has focused on bride price as an economic exchange little attention has been paid to this edifying rite of passage as an indigenous strategy for economic empowerment and family conflict prevention.

Studies such as that by Okeke (2015) have explored the social functions of Igbo marital rites but have often lumped together all pre- and post-wedding rituals without distinguishing *Ídū Ụlọ* as a unique phenomenon.

Yet, this edifying rite is more than a gesture of parental goodwill, it represents a localized form of wealth transfer, gendered support, and pre-emptive conflict resolution. Ezeanya (2019) maintains that the bride is empowered with tools: such as cooking utensils, beds, mats, yams, fowls, and sometimes goats, necessary for domestic independence, which reduces economic strain on the husband's household and strengthens marital harmony.

The feminist re-reading of indigenous African systems Oyěwùmí, (1997); Nnaemeka, (2004) further show what practices like *Ídū Ụlọ* can function as cultural rites of women's empowerment, challenging Western notions of economic patriarchy in marital institutions. In Igbo society, the woman is not just a recipient of wealth but a strategic actor whose family reinforces her agency and worth through material support. Mbiti, (1969) affirms that this rite aligns with the broader African philosophy of communalism and interdependence where the well-being of one household is intrinsically tied to the welfare of another.

However, modernity, urban migration, capitalism, and changing gender roles have led to the decline or transformation of this rite. Scholars such as Nwachukwu-Agbada (2011) have warned of the loss of intangible cultural heritage in the face of globalization, which has contributed to the rise of marital disputes, domestic violence, and family breakdowns. Modern couples, often left to fend for themselves in urban settings, face challenges that traditional support systems like it once mitigated.

Moreover, the rise of Western-style weddings has overshadowed indigenous rituals, framing of such rite as outdated or burdensome. Yet, according to Umeasiegbu (2001), reimagining traditional practices is crucial for cultural sustainability. Scholars in indigenous knowledge studies such as Battiste and Henderson, (2000) advocate for a reclamation of traditional systems that are relevant, adaptable, and community-oriented.

Igbo Marriage Customs

There are so many marriage customs and rite that are performed by the bride, groom and their relative before a man can culturally lay claim that a woman is his wife. All these rite and rituals are very important and symbolic in Igbo culture. Mbiti, (1969) Nwoye, (2011) say that Igbo marriage customs have been documented as multi-staged processes that combine economic, social, and spiritual elements. In support of the above two scholars, Nzegwu, (2006), observes that practices such as bride price (*ikwu ego isi/ime ego isi nwanyi*), gift exchange, and *Ídū Ụlọ* reflect a communal approach to marriage, where extended families play active roles in the stability of the union. These customs not only unite two individuals but also integrate entire kinship groups, thereby serving as mechanisms for cultural continuity and social regulation. On the other hand, Ezeanya-Esiobu (2019), notes that in contemporary contexts, however, these practices are under pressure from globalization, Christianity, and Western-style weddings, raising concerns about cultural erosion.

Economic Conflict Management

Economic resources are widely acknowledged as one of the most common sources of marital conflict. Scholars like Okeke (2015), argue that indigenous practices like *Ídū Ụlọ* historically functioned as a conflict-preventive mechanism, reducing financial strain at the early stages of marriage. By equipping the couple with basic resources, it minimized potential disputes over survival needs, thus ensuring smoother marital adjustment. In his own opinion, Mbiti (1969) explains that in African societies more broadly, traditional marriage institutions often embed redistributive economics to stabilize households and prevent conflict. This underscores the importance of revisiting indigenous systems for sustainable conflict management models.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

This refers to the local, traditional, and community-based knowledge that is developed and sustained by indigenous peoples over generations. It is deeply rooted in culture, history, and lived experiences, and it helps communities to adapt, survive, and thrive in their specific environments. Greiner (1998:1) asserts that indigenous knowledge is "the unique, traditional, local knowledge existing within and developed around specific conditions of women and men indigenous to a particular geographic area." Scholars such as Battiste and Henderson, (2000) say that Indigenous Knowledge Systems provide frameworks for understanding cultural practices as valid epistemologies that solve social problems within their contexts. In the Igbo worldview, marriage is not merely a personal contract but a communal and spiritual institution, supported by customs such as this rite. These practices are examples of indigenous systems that blend economic redistribution, moral values, and family responsibility. Odora (2002) notes that recent scholarship calls for re-centering such indigenous systems in contemporary policy and development discourse. Thus, *Ídū Ụlọ* exemplifies an IKS approach to economic empowerment, family stability, and conflict resolution.

Family Stability

Family stability in African contexts is often tied to communal values, kinship structures, and resource-sharing traditions. Practices like *Ídū Ụlọ* help create a foundation of economic security that strengthens marital resilience and family cohesion (Nwoye, 2011). The Igbo belief in *igwebuike* ("strength in unity") manifests through such customs, ensuring that the burden of establishing a household does not fall solely on the couple. Scholars note that when these cultural safety nets decline, marriages become more vulnerable to breakdown due to economic pressures (Okeke, 2015). Thus, this rite serves as a cultural mechanism for promoting family stability across generations.

Therefore, a gap exists in the literature concerning *Ídū Ụlọ* as a practical economic mechanism and indigenous model for conflict resolution. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a critical exploration of it within the contemporary Igbo context, drawing from oral traditions, ethnographic inquiry, and indigenous epistemologies to examine its evolving roles, meanings, and potential for revival.

The traditional elements, processes, and meanings associated with *Ídū Ụlọ* in Igbo culture

Rite of passage in relation to bride property assemblage refers to the culturally structured process through which an Igbo bride moves from the status of a daughter in her natal home to that of a wife in her husband's household. The assemblage of property (such as cooking utensils, furniture, clothing, and other domestic items) serves not only as material preparation for her new role but also as a symbolic ritual that affirms her readiness for marital responsibilities. It embodies the transition, legitimates her incorporation into her husband's lineage, and reflects the community's endorsement of her new social identity. A rite of passage is generally understood as a culturally recognized ritual or ceremony that marks the transition of an individual from one stage of life to another. Anthropologist Arnold van Gennep (1909) popularized the term, showing how such rites often involve three stages: separation, transition, and incorporation.

Scholars such as Amadiume (1987) and Ezeanya (2019) highlight *Ídū Ụlọ* as a symbolic and material practice involving the gifting of cooking utensils, food items, mats, animals, and other household tools. It is a communal event demonstrating the bride's worth and the natal family's support for her new household. Ugorji, a woman from Awgbu, Anambra State, narrates: "*Ídū Ụlọ bu uru nne na nna na-emere nwa ha nwaanyị ka ọ ghara ịla n'ụlọ di ya n'efu. Ọ na-eme ka e nwee nsọpụrụ n'etiti ezinụlọ abụọ.*" (*Ídū Ụlọ* is a gift from the bride's parents to ensure their daughter does not go to her husband's home empty. It promotes respect between the two families). The practice functions to symbolize unity, promotes social continuity, and ensures that the new family has a material base to thrive. It reinforces economic solidarity between kinship

units, strengthening inter-family alliances. This ritual is not just ceremonial, but functionally essential in the transition into marital life.

Participants consistently identified *Ídū Ụlọ* as a practical form of economic empowerment for the newly married couple, especially the bride. Items such as cooking utensils, foodstuffs, livestock, and even small-scale farming tools equip the bride with both dignity and a means of household productivity. When a woman enters her husband's house with food, yam, oil, and goats, nobody can insult her. She becomes respected. - Ibelosi, Anambra. This empowerment reduces dependency on the husband's family and mitigates early financial strain, which can lead to quarrels.

Ídū Ụlọ as a means of economic harmony and conflict mitigation in Igbo marriages

The provisioning of material goods through *Ídū Ụlọ* reduces financial dependency and household strain. According to Mbiti (1969), such practices reflect African communal ethics where family success is a collective responsibility. Nzegwu (2006) notes that these systems protected young couples from early economic stress. Odoh from Enugu-Ezike said: "*Tupu ego ako uko ma e mesia mmemme alumdi na nwunye, Ídū Ụlọ na-eme ka di na nwunye ghara ịgba mgba n'ihe ha ga-eri. Ọ bụ ihe na-eme ka ụmụnne nwunye mara na ha so n'ihe a na-eme.*" (Before money became scarce after marriage ceremony, *Ídū Ụlọ* helps prevent couples from struggling over what to eat. It made the bride's siblings feel a sense of shared obligation.)

The above explanations showed that *Ídū Ụlọ* reinforces gendered expectations within Igbo society. The bride's family, particularly the mother and extended female relatives (Umuada), bear the responsibility of preparing and presenting *Ídū Ụlọ*. The men do the bride price. The women do the rite of *Ídū Ụlọ*. That's our custom. It's how we give our daughter pride. - Ubabuike Umuada Leader, Imo State. While empowering, this also reflects the culturally assigned roles of women as homemakers and supporters of domestic continuity. Here, *Ídū Ụlọ* serves as a social safety net that ensures economic balance and reduces potential points of conflict. Its role in conflict prevention lies in equipping the household to survive early pressures, allowing relationships to develop in peace.

Ídū Ụlọ in the era of modernization

Umeasiegbu (2001) and Nwachukwu-Agbada (2011) note that the influence of Western wedding practices and economic hardship has diminished *Ídū Ụlọ*. Many families now prioritize expensive white weddings, sidelining traditional rites. Urban couples may even consider *Ídū Ụlọ* irrelevant. A newly married woman in Awka Benedicta states: "*Mama m gwara m na nne na nna ya mekwera ya mmemme Ídū Ụlọ mana n' Ọka ebe m bi ugbu a, enyi m gwara m na ọ dighị mkpa. Anyị zụtara gas cooker na TV anyị n'onwe anyị.*" (My mother told me her parent did *Ídū Ụlọ* for her, but here in Awka, my friend told me it's not important. My husband and I bought our gas cooker and TV ourselves.)

This decline in *Ídū Ụlọ* disrupts traditional social functions that ensured economic support and family integration. As modernity shifts focus to individual achievement and nuclear living, the functional bond between kinship units weakens, leading to fragile marital foundations and potential for unmanaged conflict. Participants expressed concern about the decline of *Ídū Ụlọ* due to Christianity, urbanization, and globalization. However, many argued for its reimagination, suggesting modern equivalents like gas cookers, cash, electronics, houses, landed property or even business start-up kits. "My daughter's *Ídū Ụlọ* rite of passage included a freezer and POS machine. That's today's tradition." - Abigail an Igbo Mother in Lagos. This theme reflects the dynamic negotiation between tradition and modernity in Igbo marital practices.

Ídū Ụlọ and economic and emotional impacts

Okeke, (2015) says that modern Igbo marriages experience higher levels of stress due to lack of familial support systems. Studies show that financial pressure is a leading cause of early marital breakdown. Without *Ídū Ụlọ* couples often begin life without basic resources, creating room for conflict. Nkemka, a divorcee from Nsukka says: "*Mgbe m lara di,* ọ bụ naanị *enyi m nyere m ngwa e ji esi nri abụọ. Di m ji ya akọ m ọnụ oge ọbụla na-asi na mụ enweghị ihe. Ebe nna m si na ọ dighị mkpa i mere m emume Ídū Ụlọ.*". (When I got married, only a friend gave me some kitchenware. My husband was abusing me all the time saying that I do not have anything, whereas my father said it was not necessary to perform the *Ídū Ụlọ* rite for me).

The absence of *Ídū Ụlọ* disrupts the economic function of cultural marriage systems, creating a vacuum that can manifest in emotional resentment, power imbalance, and conflict. By failing to equip the bride materially, the natal family unintentionally removes a functional layer of social security. Several interviewees noted that the presence of this noble rite of passage in a new marriage prevents early conflict, especially those

stemming from lack of basic household needs. "Without pot, without spoon, how will peace stay in the house? *Ídū Ụlọ* stops that shame and fight from the beginning." – Nchedochukwu, a traditional marriage counsellor, Enugu. The practice also promotes family involvement in the marriage, which serves as an accountability and mediation system when conflicts arise.

How *Ídū Ụlọ* can be reimagined or institutionalized as a viable framework for family conflict resolution in the modern Igbo context

Scholars like Nnaemeka (2004) advocate for reclaiming African traditions through re-negotiation, not rejection. *Ídū Ụlọ* could be adapted to include modern household items or financial contributions, integrating tradition into contemporary realities. Uwakwe, a cultural consultant in Onitsha stated: " *Ídū Ụlọ ka dị mkpa. Anyị nwere ike ime ya n'ụzọ ọhụrụ - kpọọ ya 'start-up support' ma mee ka ndị nne na nna na-enyere ụmụ ha aka site n'uzo di otu a.*" (*Ídū Ụlọ* is still important. We can do it in a new way, call it 'start-up support' and ensure parents assist their children.")

As society evolves, functional structures must adapt to maintain relevance. Institutionalizing *Ídū Ụlọ* perhaps as "marital start-up kits" or through cultural associations, can preserve its stabilizing role while bridging tradition and modernity. Finally, the interviews highlighted how this rite of passage promotes inter-family relationships and cohesion. It is not just a bride's preparation, but a ceremony of familial unity and shared responsibility. "It is not only our daughter going; it is our name, our pride. That's why we gather food, kitchenware and other valuable things." - Bernard, an uncle to the Bride, Nsukka. This strengthens communal ethics, binding the two families in cooperation, mutual respect, and emotional investment in the success of the marriage.

From what has been discussed above, it shows that this rite of passage functions beyond ritual; it is a strategic indigenous institution for economic support, gender role performance, conflict prevention, and inter-family solidarity. While it is undergoing transformations in form, its foundational values remain resilient and culturally relevant. Reinforcing *Ídū Ụlọ* may offer a homegrown solution to economic and social instability in young marriages within Igbo society. It equally reveals its deep significance in promoting economic harmony, inter-family cooperation, and marital stability. Though weakened by modern influences, it retains the potential to function as an indigenous conflict management tool if culturally reimagined to suit 21st-century realities.

Findings

Ídū Ụlọ as a rite of passage is more than a ceremonial custom: The study finds that this rite of passage is not merely a cultural tradition but a functional socio-economic support system. It plays a vital role in helping new couples begin life with some level of economic stability, thereby reducing early marital tensions.

Ídū Ụlọ contributes to economic harmony and family integration: Through oral interviews and literature, the research shows that it builds bridges between the bride's natal and marital families, encouraging cooperation and shared responsibility. This integration often prevents or diffuses potential economic disputes within the new household.

Decline of *Ídū Ụlọ* in urbanized and Christianised Igbo contexts: In modern Igbo society, especially among urban, Christian, and Western-influenced families, this rite is either neglected or considered optional. Many young couples now start marriages without the traditional support system, leading to increased financial strain and emotional isolation.

The Absence of *Ídū Ụlọ* exacerbates marital conflict: The research reveals that when it is not performed, couples often face unanticipated hardships such as food insecurity, lack of household essentials, and dependency on loans. These hardships sometimes translate into domestic quarrels, blame, and instability.

There is Potential for Cultural Adaptation and Policy Re-imagination: The study finds a growing awareness among elders, cultural custodians, and community leaders that *Ídū Ụlọ* can be reimagined to fit contemporary realities, such as providing digital gadgets, cash support, or furniture. This opens the possibility for its institutionalization as a conflict-preventive economic intervention.

This rite reflects Igbo communal ethics and gender empowerment: The practice affirms the collective responsibility of the bride's family and community in ensuring the well-being of the marriage. It also empowers the bride by providing her with tools that elevate her dignity and reduce her vulnerability in the husband's home.

Recommendations

Reinstitution of *Ídū Ụlọ* in Modern Marriage Practices: Igbo families should be encouraged to revive and adapt it even in modern or Christian wedding contexts, as a form of *economic empowerment and familial support* to prevent early marital stress.

Community and cultural organization support: Town unions, cultural groups, and women's institutions (e.g., *Ụmụada* and *Ndi Ichie*) should formally include this rite or similar initiatives as part of premarital counselling or marital support schemes for young couples.

Policy integration into local Government Customary Affairs: Local and state governments through cultural affairs departments should document, support, and recognize it as a viable indigenous method for conflict prevention and youth empowerment, especially in rural development policies.

Modern Reimagination of *Ídū Ụlọ*: This rite should be restructured to include relevant 21st-century items such as kitchen appliances, electronics, financial support, and even small business equipment. This reimagination will make the practice relevant and practical for modern couples.

Further academic and gender-focused research: More research is recommended to study how this rite of passage can contribute to gender equality, emotional wellbeing, and long-term household sustainability, particularly in low-income and peri-urban Igbo communities.

Conclusion

The study has shown that *Ídū Ụlọ* is not merely a traditional rite, but a deeply rooted indigenous economic system that sustains marriages, prevents conflict, and affirms the collective nature of family support in Igbo society. Despite its decline under the pressures of Westernization, urbanization, and religious shifts, it remains a viable and culturally resonant institution.

Reviving and reimagining this rite for the 21st century offers the Igbo society a homegrown, culturally sensitive solution to growing rates of marital breakdown, economic hardship, and intergenerational disconnection. The tradition reflects the Igbo belief in communal living (*igwebuike*), and when harnessed properly, it can become a sustainable indigenous model for economic conflict resolution, youth stability, and family cohesion.

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APPENDIX - LIST OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED

Name	Age	Occupation	Venue	Date
Ugorji Nneka	65years	Trader	Awgbu	08/06/2025
Ibelosi Obioma	52years	Seamstress	Anam	10/06/ 2025
Odoh Augustine	60years	Dirge performer	Enugu-Ezike	14/06/2025
Ubabudike Gladys	69years	Retired Civil Servant	Ibiasoegbe	17/06/2025
Umunna Abigail	52years	Teaching	Arochukwu (residing in Lagos)	19/06/2025
Nkemka Nwakaego	38years	Civil servant	Nsukka	22/06/2025
Benedicta Uche	25years	Fashion Designer	Awka	24/06/2025
Nchedochukwu Ugwu	75years	Traditional Marriage Counselor		27/06/2025
Uwakwe Ugochukwu	71years	Cultural Consultant	Onitsha	30/06/2025

CHRISTIAN MARTYRDOM, WITNESS, AND INSECURITY CHALLENGES IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom, witness, and insecurity challenges in Kaduna State through a qualitative research approach drawing on library materials, scholarly journals, internet sources, and books. Kaduna State has remained one of the most affected regions in Nigeria where religious conflicts and insecurity continue to shape the lived realities of Christians. The research investigates how martyrdom, understood as the ultimate sacrifice for faith, influences Christian witness in the face of threats, persecution, and violence. The narratives of victims and the resilience of Christian communities demonstrate that martyrdom strengthens faith, inspires commitment to evangelism, and reinforces the identity of the church, even under duress. However, insecurity has also resulted in displacement, loss of lives, and hindered church growth in the affected areas. Findings reveal that insecurity in Kaduna is not only driven by ethno-religious tensions but also by political manipulation, poverty, and weak security structures, all of which have heightened hostility toward Christians. The study concludes that Christian witness in Kaduna is both challenged and deepened by experiences of martyrdom, highlighting the paradox of faith under persecution. It recommends intentional dialogue between Christians and Muslims, effective security interventions, government policies that promote justice and equity, and the church's continued emphasis on forgiveness, resilience, and peacebuilding as pathways to sustainable coexistence.

Keywords: Christian martyrdom, witness, insecurity, Kaduna State, persecution

Introduction

The phenomenon of Christian martyrdom and witness amid insecurity has become a pressing subject in contemporary Nigerian society, particularly in Kaduna State. Kaduna, located in north-central Nigeria, has long been characterized by ethno-religious diversity but also by recurrent episodes of violent conflict. The escalation of insecurity in recent decades, marked by terrorism, communal clashes, and banditry, has profoundly affected both Christian and Muslim communities. However, Christians, as a religious minority in many parts of northern Nigeria, have frequently experienced targeted persecution that results in death, displacement, and destruction of property (Okpanachi, 2020). These realities raise questions about the meaning of martyrdom, the role of Christian witness, and the impact of insecurity on the faith and survival of Christian communities.

Martyrdom, within the Christian tradition, has historically been understood as the ultimate expression of loyalty to Christ and an act of testimony that inspires others (Moss, 2012). In contexts

such as Kaduna State, where Christians often face violence because of their religious identity, martyrdom is not only theological but also socio-political. It carries implications for how faith is lived, remembered, and transmitted to future generations. Witness, closely tied to the concept of martyrdom, encompasses both proclamation of the gospel and the lived testimony of resilience, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence in hostile contexts (Hunsberger, 1995). These dimensions make Christian responses to insecurity an important area of inquiry.

Insecurity in Kaduna is shaped by multiple factors including poverty, weak governance, ethnic rivalries, and political manipulation of religion (Aleyomi & Alao, 2018). Attacks on churches, kidnappings, and destruction of Christian communities exacerbate these challenges, threatening not only lives but also the mission and growth of the church (Ikelegbe & Ukoji, 2019). Yet, paradoxically, such conditions have also produced resilient expressions of faith, where Christians reinterpret suffering as participation in the life and witness of Christ.

This study, therefore, seeks to clarify and analyze the interplay between Christian martyrdom, witness, and insecurity challenges in Kaduna State. It aims to explore how Christians respond to violence, how martyrdom influences community identity, and how insecurity affects the growth and mission of the church. By employing qualitative research that draws on books, journals, and documented experiences, the research provides insight into the paradoxical role of suffering in strengthening faith while also highlighting the urgent need for peacebuilding, justice, and dialogue in Kaduna.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts of Christian martyrdom, witness, and insecurity challenges in Kaduna State are interconnected within theological, sociological, and political discourse. Clarifying these terms provides a foundation for understanding their implications in the study. Christian Martyrdom refers to the act of suffering or dying for one's faith. Within Christian theology, it is seen as the highest expression of fidelity to Christ (Tertullian, as cited in Moss, 2012). Early church history presents martyrs as individuals whose sacrifice strengthened the faith of others. In Kaduna State, martyrdom is often linked to violent attacks on Christians due to their religious identity, where victims are remembered not only for their loss but for their testimony of steadfast faith (Okpanachi, 2020).

Witness. The Greek term martyria implies both testimony and the act of witnessing to the truth of the gospel, even in hostile contexts (Hunsberger, 1995). Christian witness extends beyond verbal proclamation to include acts of love, forgiveness, and resilience in the face of persecution. In Kaduna, witness is demonstrated by the church's continued presence, commitment to evangelism, and peaceful coexistence despite violent threats (Adamu, 2017).

Insecurity Challenges. Insecurity refers to a condition of vulnerability to violence, threats, and instability. In Kaduna State, insecurity manifests through ethno-religious crises, terrorism, banditry, and herder-farmer clashes (Ikelegbe & Ukoji, 2019). These challenges are aggravated by weak governance structures, poverty, and political manipulation, which create fertile ground for conflict (Aleyomi & Alao, 2018). For Christians, insecurity has led to displacement, loss of life, and destruction of places of worship, thereby influencing the dynamics of faith practice and community cohesion.

Conceptually, the intersection of martyrdom, witness, and insecurity in Kaduna reveals a paradox: while insecurity threatens survival, martyrdom and faithful witness inspire resilience and deepen religious commitment. These concepts therefore cannot be studied in isolation but must be understood within the broader socio-political and theological context of Kaduna State.

Theological Perspectives on Martyrdom and Witness in Kaduna State

The phenomenon of Christian martyrdom and witness in Kaduna State is not only a historical and socio-political reality but also a deeply theological issue. The experiences of persecution, insecurity, and violent conflict in Kaduna raise fundamental questions about the meaning of Christian suffering, the nature of faithful witness, and the role of the church in contexts

of hostility. Theological perspectives offer interpretive frameworks that enable Christians to make sense of their experiences while shaping their responses to insecurity and violence.

i. **Martyrdom as Participation in Christ's Suffering:** A central theological perspective on martyrdom is its understanding as participation in the suffering of Christ. The New Testament repeatedly presents suffering for Christ as a sharing in his passion (Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:13). Early church writers such as Tertullian emphasized that "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church," suggesting that martyrdom not only strengthens individual faith but also contributes to the growth of the Christian community (Moss, 2012). In Kaduna, Christian leaders and communities often interpret the killing of believers during attacks as participation in Christ's redemptive suffering. This interpretation provides meaning to loss and frames martyrdom not as defeat but as a testimony that aligns the church with its Lord (Adamu, 2017).
ii. **Witness (Martyria) as Testimony of Faith:** Theologically, martyrdom is closely linked to the concept of witness. The Greek term martyria means testimony, and by extension, those who die for their faith are considered ultimate witnesses to the truth of the gospel (Hunsberger, 1995). In Kaduna, Christians see witness not only in verbal proclamation but also in the resilience, forgiveness, and peaceful coexistence practiced in hostile environments. For example, survivors of attacks who rebuild churches, continue worship, and refuse to retaliate embody a living witness to the gospel of peace. This witness demonstrates that Christian testimony is not silenced by violence but is amplified through perseverance.
iii. **Suffering as a Theological Resource:** Persecution in Kaduna has also reinforced the theological idea that suffering is an inevitable part of the Christian journey. Paul's writings describe suffering as producing perseverance, character, and hope (Romans 5:3–5). This perspective has been appropriated in Kaduna, where Christian communities interpret their insecurity not merely as tragedy but as an opportunity to embody steadfast faith. Such suffering is seen as both a trial and a testimony that validates Christian discipleship in contexts of hostility (Okpanachi, 2020). This approach does not trivialize the pain of martyrdom but frames it as a theological resource for strengthening communal identity and commitment to mission.
iv. **Martyrdom, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation:** Another theological dimension of martyrdom in Kaduna is its connection to forgiveness and reconciliation. Christian teaching emphasizes love for enemies and forgiveness even under persecution (Matthew 5:44; Luke 23:34). Many church leaders in Kaduna encourage forgiveness toward aggressors, drawing parallels to Christ's response on the cross. This theological emphasis transforms martyrdom from mere victimhood into a call for reconciliation. While forgiveness does not erase injustice, it functions as a radical witness that challenges cycles of retaliation and opens the possibility for peacebuilding in Kaduna's divided communities (Aleyomi & Alao, 2018).
v. **Martyrdom and Eschatological Hope:** Theological perspectives on martyrdom in Kaduna are shaped by eschatological hope. The promise of eternal life and resurrection assures believers that death does not have the final word (1 Corinthians 15:54–55). Christians in Kaduna often draw strength from this hope, believing that those who die for their faith enter into eternal reward. This eschatological perspective helps communities cope with loss while sustaining a long-term vision of faith that transcends insecurity. In sermons, worship, and memorials, eschatology functions as a lens through which martyrdom is reinterpreted as victory rather than defeat (Ikelegbe & Ukoji, 2019).

Christian Response to Persecution and Insecurity in Kaduna State

The Christian response to persecution and insecurity in Kaduna State has been shaped by a long history of violent conflicts, ranging from ethno-religious crises in the 1980s and 1990s to the more recent threats posed by terrorism, banditry, and farmer–herder conflicts. Faced with these

challenges, Christians have demonstrated a diverse range of responses that balance theological convictions with practical adaptations for survival. These responses can be broadly analyzed under resilience in worship, forgiveness and peacebuilding, advocacy for justice, humanitarian engagement, interfaith dialogue, and faith-based coping strategies.

i. **Resilience in Worship and Community Life:** Resilience is perhaps the most striking response of Christians in Kaduna. Despite the destruction of churches, the killing of members, and mass displacement, Christians consistently rebuild places of worship and resume gatherings. Such resilience serves as both a form of defiance against fear and a declaration of faith. Adamu (2017) observes that many Christians interpret church rebuilding not merely as physical reconstruction but as a theological statement of hope in Christ's ultimate victory over violence. This resilience also extends to maintaining schools, hospitals, and community programs, even when insecurity threatens their existence.

ii. **Forgiveness and Peacebuilding:** Christian leaders often preach forgiveness as central to Christian witness. Drawing from biblical injunctions such as Matthew 5:44 ("love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you"), forgiveness is presented as a means of breaking cycles of revenge. Okpanachi (2020) highlights how several Christian leaders in Southern Kaduna have partnered with Muslim clerics in joint peace campaigns, demonstrating that forgiveness can coexist with efforts at reconciliation. This approach not only fosters peacebuilding but also reinforces the Christian conviction that martyrdom and suffering can become redemptive testimonies rather than destructive forces.

iii. **Advocacy for Justice and Human Rights:** While forgiveness remains central, Christians also pursue justice through advocacy. The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other faith-based organizations consistently petition state and federal governments to protect communities and prosecute perpetrators of violence (Ikelegbe & Ukoji, 2019). Advocacy is not merely political but theological, rooted in the biblical demand for justice (Isaiah 1:17). Through protests, petitions, and collaboration with civil society groups, Christians emphasize that forgiveness does not negate accountability. Advocacy thus becomes a dual witness: one that embodies endurance while also affirming the necessity of justice for lasting peace.

iv. **Humanitarian Engagement:** Another important Christian response is humanitarian action. Churches and Christian NGOs provide relief for internally displaced persons (IDPs), offering food, shelter, and counseling services. These acts of service reinforce the witness of compassion and solidarity. According to Aghedo and Osumah (2012), Christian humanitarian responses also serve as indirect evangelistic opportunities, as they extend care not only to Christians but sometimes to Muslims affected by violence. Such humanitarian engagement transforms suffering into a platform for service and mission, embodying the gospel's call to love one's neighbor.

v. **Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation:** Interfaith dialogue has become an essential Christian strategy in Kaduna. Given the religious undertones of many conflicts, fostering understanding between Christians and Muslims is viewed as crucial for peace. Initiatives such as the Kaduna State Peace Commission and interfaith youth forums have drawn participation from Christian leaders, who see dialogue as a form of proactive witness (Best & Hoomlong, 2011). By building bridges with Muslims, Christians attempt to dismantle stereotypes and reduce hostilities, thereby addressing insecurity at its roots.

vi. **Faith-Based Coping Strategies:** At the spiritual level, Christians rely heavily on prayer, fasting, and scriptural meditation as coping strategies. Sermons often frame persecution as participation in Christ's suffering, reminding believers of Jesus' words in John 16:33: "In this world you will have tribulation, but take heart; I have overcome the world." Hunsberger (1995) stresses that the church's witness (martyria) lies in interpreting suffering not as defeat but as testimony to the gospel. This perspective enables Christians to endure insecurity with hope, sustained by eschatological promises of eternal life and divine justice.

Socio-Political Factors Contributing to Insecurity in Kaduna State

Insecurity in Kaduna State is the outcome of a complex interplay of historical, political, economic, and social forces that have shaped intercommunal relations for decades. The perception that violence in Kaduna is solely the result of religious intolerance is misleading, as deeper socio-political factors underlie recurring crises. Understanding these root causes is essential for appreciating why insecurity has persisted and why it has had such devastating effects on Christian communities in particular.

Historically, colonial policies laid the groundwork for insecurity by exacerbating ethnic and religious divisions. The system of indirect rule favored Hausa-Fulani Muslim elites in Northern Nigeria, creating resentment among minority groups, most of whom were Christians or adhered to traditional religions (Ochonu, 2014). These minority groups, concentrated in Southern Kaduna, experienced systemic marginalization in politics and governance. The colonial legacy of unequal access to resources and representation contributed to a sense of exclusion that still fuels mistrust and violent confrontations. This historical foundation means that conflict in Kaduna is not only about immediate grievances but also about longstanding struggles over identity, belonging, and control.

The manipulation of religion for political purposes has further deepened insecurity. Political elites have often mobilized supporters along ethno-religious lines, particularly during elections, thereby inflaming tensions between Christians and Muslims. The introduction of Sharia law in several northern states, including Kaduna, intensified sectarian divisions and generated violent clashes that disproportionately affected Christians (Ibrahim, 2013). Religion thus becomes a political tool rather than a purely spiritual identity, and its exploitation by leaders perpetuates conflict by reinforcing boundaries between communities. As Best (2011) argues, political actors thrive on these divisions because they consolidate power by appealing to narrow identities, even at the expense of peace.

Economic deprivation has also played a major role in sustaining insecurity. Once known for its thriving industries, Kaduna has suffered economic decline since the 1980s, resulting in mass unemployment, particularly among youth (Aleyomi & Alao, 2018). This economic stagnation has made young men especially vulnerable to recruitment by violent groups, including militias, bandits, and extremist movements. The collapse of agricultural productivity due to persistent violence further worsens poverty levels in Southern Kaduna, where Christian communities depend heavily on farming. When farms are destroyed and villagers displaced, food insecurity sets in, reinforcing a cycle of deprivation and vulnerability. Poverty therefore serves as both a cause and consequence of insecurity, as desperate populations become more susceptible to manipulation by political or religious entrepreneurs.

Weak governance and security failures also contribute significantly to the crisis. In many cases, perpetrators of violence in Kaduna act with impunity because they are rarely arrested or prosecuted. Ikelegbe and Ukoji (2019) note that the Nigerian state has struggled to provide effective security, which erodes public confidence in government institutions. For Christian communities, perceptions of bias within security agencies further heighten insecurity, as victims often feel abandoned during attacks (Okpanachi, 2020). The lack of accountability emboldens perpetrators to repeat attacks, while communities resort to self-defense measures that can escalate tensions. Thus, governance failures perpetuate a cycle where insecurity persists because institutions meant to provide protection are either absent, weak, or distrusted.

The farmer–herder conflict represents another dimension of Kaduna's insecurity. Environmental pressures such as desertification in northern Nigeria have forced many Fulani herders southward into Christian farming communities in Southern Kaduna, resulting in fierce competition over land and water resources. These clashes are frequently framed in religious terms because of the ethnic and religious identities of the groups involved, but their underlying cause is resource scarcity and governance failure (International Crisis Group, 2017). For Christians in Southern Kaduna, these violent encounters are interpreted as targeted persecution, further fueling feelings of marginalization and fear.

The Impact of Insecurity on Church Growth and Mission in Kaduna State

The church in Kaduna State exists within a context marked by insecurity, violence, and persistent socio-political instability. These challenges have significantly affected its growth and mission, altering not only the physical structures of congregations but also the spiritual, social, and mission al dimensions of church life. Insecurity, particularly in the form of ethno-religious crises, terrorist attacks, farmer–herder clashes, and targeted persecution, has created an environment in which the church's ability to thrive is continually tested. The impact of this insecurity is evident in disrupted worship, population displacement, weakened infrastructure, strained evangelistic outreach, and new missional opportunities rooted in resilience and witness.

One of the most immediate impacts of insecurity is the destruction of lives and property. Attacks on churches during worship services, kidnappings of pastors, and burning of church buildings have left many congregations without safe spaces to gather (Adamu, 2017). In rural areas of Southern Kaduna, where Christians form the majority, repeated attacks have displaced entire communities, forcing believers into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. This disruption not only undermines regular worship but also weakens the sense of community that is central to Christian life and mission. The destruction of physical infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, and mission stations further limits the church's capacity to serve society.

Insecurity also affects numerical growth. While Christianity has historically expanded in Southern Kaduna through mission schools and evangelistic efforts, violent attacks often lead to population decline as believers flee unsafe regions. Many young people migrate to safer urban centers, leaving behind aging congregations with limited resources. According to Okpanachi (2020), the outmigration of Christians from volatile areas reduces the church's visibility and weakens its influence in interfaith relations. The demographic shifts caused by displacement therefore diminish the church's evangelistic presence in areas where it is most needed.

Missionary activities have been particularly constrained by insecurity. Evangelism in rural communities is difficult when roads are unsafe, villages are frequently attacked, and missionary personnel face risks of abduction or death. Hunsberger (1995) emphasizes that Christian witness involves both proclamation and presence, yet insecurity in Kaduna often prevents missionaries from maintaining long-term presence in communities. This has led to a decline in church planting efforts and reduced access to Christian education, which historically served as a vital means of evangelization in the region. Thus, insecurity hinders the expansion of Christianity into unreached areas, stalling the mission mandate of the church.

Beyond physical and numerical decline, insecurity also produces psychological and spiritual impacts. Fear, trauma, and grief shape how Christians in Kaduna experience their faith. The constant threat of violence makes it difficult for some believers to fully participate in church life, while others interpret persecution as a test of faith and a call to deeper commitment. Moss (2012) notes that martyrdom has historically strengthened Christian identity, and this pattern is evident in Kaduna, where accounts of faithful believers who endured suffering often inspire resilience among surviving communities. For many Christians, insecurity reinforces the conviction that mission is not only about growth in numbers but also about faithful witness in adversity.

At the same time, insecurity has created unexpected opportunities for mission and renewal. The humanitarian needs generated by displacement and violence have compelled churches to engage more actively in relief and social services. Many congregations have established programs to provide food, shelter, education, and counseling for victims of violence. Such actions embody the gospel's call to love one's neighbor and have opened doors for renewed witness in society (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Moreover, interfaith dialogue initiatives aimed at peacebuilding have expanded the scope of mission beyond evangelism to include reconciliation and justice. While insecurity restricts certain forms of outreach, it has simultaneously reshaped the church's mission to address the holistic needs of suffering communities.

Insecurity Challenges Confronting the Church Today in Kaduna State

The church in Kaduna State faces multiple insecurity challenges that continue to hinder its mission, growth, and the well-being of its members. These challenges are rooted in religious intolerance, terrorism, political instability, and socio-economic crises that intersect to create a climate of fear and hostility. Kaduna, often regarded as the political and cultural hub of Northern Nigeria, has become a flashpoint of ethno-religious tensions, where Christians regularly find themselves at the center of violent conflicts. The insecurity that confronts the church today manifests in attacks on worshippers, displacement, restrictions on evangelism, and a broader atmosphere of fear that undermines the church's witness and communal life.

One of the foremost challenges is the direct targeting of Christian communities during worship. Over the past decade, churches have repeatedly been attacked during Sunday services by armed groups, leaving behind significant casualties (Okpanachi, 2020). Such violence disrupts the spiritual rhythm of congregational life, instills fear among worshippers, and forces many churches to adopt costly security measures. The sanctity of worship, which should serve as a refuge for believers, has instead become associated with vulnerability. This consistent threat not only discourages attendance but also creates long-term psychological trauma for survivors.

Another major challenge is the displacement of Christian populations from their ancestral lands. Persistent attacks in rural Southern Kaduna have forced thousands of believers into Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Many who once lived in vibrant Christian farming communities are now unable to return home due to insecurity, land seizures, and lack of government protection (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). The displacement undermines local churches, as congregations lose members and resources, while pastors struggle to minister to scattered flocks. The church's mission is further weakened when displaced members relocate to urban areas, where integration and survival become primary concerns over spiritual development.

The church also faces significant restrictions on evangelistic and missionary activities. Insecurity has made it difficult for pastors and missionaries to travel freely to rural communities, as roads are unsafe due to kidnappings and banditry (Adamu, 2017). As a result, church planting efforts and outreach ministries have slowed down drastically. Evangelism, once a central aspect of Christian witness in Kaduna, is now overshadowed by concerns for survival and safety. This shift challenges the core mandate of the church to spread the gospel and nurture discipleship.

Furthermore, insecurity contributes to economic hardship, which indirectly affects the church. The destruction of farmlands, homes, and businesses in Christian-dominated areas reduces the financial capacity of congregants to support church activities. Many families, already impoverished by violence, are unable to contribute to offerings or tithes, weakening the church's financial base. Without adequate resources, churches struggle to maintain their ministries, provide humanitarian support to victims of violence, or invest in peacebuilding initiatives. This economic strain creates a cycle of dependence and vulnerability, limiting the church's long-term sustainability.

In addition, insecurity fosters a climate of fear and mistrust that threatens Christian unity and resilience. Many believers question the silence or perceived complicity of political leaders in addressing violence against Christians, leading to disillusionment and frustration (Ibrahim, 2013). Others grapple with theological questions about suffering, divine justice, and the meaning of faith amid persecution. These internal struggles test the spiritual strength of the church, as leaders must balance pastoral care with advocacy for justice and peace.

The Church Pastoral and Theological Response to Persecution in Kaduna State

Persecution in Kaduna State has posed a persistent challenge to the church, yet it has also evoked profound pastoral and theological responses that reflect resilience, faith, and the enduring mission of the Christian community. Faced with violent attacks, displacement, and systemic marginalization, churches have not only sought ways to care for the physical and emotional needs of their members but have also developed theological frameworks that interpret suffering within the broader narrative of Christian witness. The dual approach of pastoral care and theological reflection

has allowed the church in Kaduna to sustain its identity and continue its mission even in the midst of hostility.

Pastorally, the church has responded to persecution by providing comfort, counseling, and material support to victims of violence. Many congregations have established relief initiatives that offer food, shelter, and medical assistance to displaced persons, especially in Southern Kaduna where attacks have left entire communities in ruins (Okpanachi, 2020). Clergy and lay leaders often serve as mediators, helping traumatized families process grief and loss. The use of pastoral counseling rooted in scripture and prayer has proven vital in helping Christians regain hope. As Adamu (2017) observes, the pastoral response in Northern Nigeria involves not only meeting immediate needs but also reinforcing a sense of solidarity, reminding believers that they are part of a wider body of Christ that suffers together and shares in each other's burdens.

Theologically, the church interprets persecution through the lens of martyrdom and faithful witness. The suffering of Christians in Kaduna is often compared to the experiences of the early church, where believers endured trials for the sake of Christ. This perspective offers a sense of continuity with the historical Christian tradition, framing persecution as both a test of faith and an opportunity to demonstrate loyalty to Christ (Moss, 2012). Many sermons and teachings emphasize biblical passages such as Matthew 5:10–12 and 2 Timothy 3:12, which highlight the inevitability of persecution for the faithful. Such theological reflections encourage believers to view their suffering not as abandonment by God but as participation in the larger redemptive story of the gospel.

Another significant theological response has been the emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation. While human instinct leans toward retaliation, the church has consistently taught forgiveness as modeled by Christ on the cross. Religious leaders urge members to pray for their persecutors and engage in peacebuilding efforts, even when justice appears elusive. Ibrahim (2013) notes that Christian leaders in Kaduna often play a central role in interfaith dialogue, striving to reduce tensions between Christians and Muslims through initiatives that promote mutual understanding. By grounding their message in Christ's command to love one's enemies, churches seek to transform the narrative of violence into one of reconciliation, even in environments marked by bitterness and mistrust.

The pastoral and theological responses also extend to strengthening discipleship and resilience. Persecution, rather than silencing the church, has deepened its commitment to mission. Bible studies, prayer meetings, and fasting programs have become avenues for building spiritual endurance. As Hunsberger (1995) argues, witness in the face of opposition carries a powerful missional dimension, as the steadfastness of persecuted Christians becomes a testimony to the surrounding society. In Kaduna, stories of believers who remain faithful despite suffering inspire both local and global Christian communities, reinforcing the idea that persecution refines rather than diminishes faith.

Eschatological Hope and the Reward of Martyrs in Kaduna State

The church in Kaduna State has endured repeated waves of persecution, marked by violent attacks, killings, and displacement of Christian communities. These experiences have placed believers in situations that mirror the struggles of the early church, where faithfulness often came at the cost of life itself. In such a context, eschatological hope—the Christian belief in the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises at the end of time—plays a vital role in sustaining believers and shaping their response to suffering. For many Christians in Kaduna, the assurance of eternal life and the reward promised to martyrs provide both comfort and courage, ensuring that their present suffering is not seen as meaningless but as a pathway to eternal glory in Christ.

Central to eschatological hope is the conviction that death is not the end for believers. The New Testament emphasizes that those who remain steadfast in faith despite persecution will inherit the kingdom of God (Revelation 2:10). This promise resonates deeply with Christians in Kaduna, where attacks on worshippers and the destruction of churches have created an atmosphere of despair. The hope of resurrection and eternal communion with God allows martyrs to be remembered not simply as victims of violence but as witnesses whose faith points toward a greater reality. Moss

(2012) notes that throughout Christian history, martyrdom has been framed as participation in Christ's suffering, with the ultimate reward being eternal life. This theological perspective continues to inspire Kaduna Christians who see their martyred brothers and sisters as having entered into everlasting victory with Christ.

The reward of martyrs is also interpreted in terms of honor and vindication. While persecuted Christians in Kaduna may be marginalized and silenced in the present, eschatological hope assures them of divine justice. The vision in Revelation 6:9–11, where the souls of martyrs cry out for vindication, offers assurance that God will ultimately judge oppressors and reward the faithful with rest and glory. This belief helps many Christians endure present injustice without succumbing to hatred or despair. Instead of seeing their suffering as wasted, they view it as an offering that testifies to the supremacy of Christ over violence and death. According to Adamu (2017), Nigerian church leaders frequently draw on such eschatological imagery to encourage congregations, reminding them that God's justice will prevail in the end.

Eschatological hope also strengthens collective resilience by shifting the focus from temporary afflictions to eternal rewards. In Kaduna, where displacement and loss of livelihoods have weakened communities, the assurance of a heavenly inheritance motivates Christians to persevere. This hope fosters unity among believers, who see themselves as pilgrims journeying toward a promised future. Hunsberger (1995) argues that the church's witness in suffering is itself eschatological, pointing forward to the fulfillment of God's kingdom where peace and justice will reign. Thus, even in Kaduna's insecurity, the church embodies a living testimony that present trials are temporary when viewed against the backdrop of eternal hope.

Furthermore, the eschatological perspective offers a redefinition of victory. In a worldly sense, persecution often appears to silence the church through destruction and death. Yet, from a theological perspective, martyrdom is not defeat but triumph, because it demonstrates unwavering loyalty to Christ. Ibrahim (2013) highlights that many persecuted Christians in Kaduna interpret suffering as a refining process that produces a deeper witness of faith. The eschatological promise of "the crown of life" (James 1:12) reassures believers that their endurance will be richly rewarded by God. This redefinition of victory transforms grief into testimony, enabling communities to celebrate the faithfulness of martyrs rather than being overwhelmed by despair.

Conclusion

The church in Kaduna State continues to navigate one of the most difficult contexts of insecurity and persecution in contemporary Nigeria. For decades, Christians have faced violent attacks, systemic marginalization, and displacement that have profoundly disrupted worship, fellowship, and mission activities. Yet, these challenges have also produced a resilient faith community that embodies the biblical witness of endurance and hope. The reality of martyrdom in Kaduna is not merely an account of loss but a testimony of participation in Christ's suffering, reminding the church of the eternal reward promised to those who remain steadfast. Insecurity, though devastating, has compelled the church to expand its mission beyond the pulpit, engaging in humanitarian service, trauma healing, interfaith dialogue, and peacebuilding.

This dynamic response demonstrates that the church is not merely a victim of insecurity but also an agent of transformation, turning adversity into opportunities for witness and reconciliation. The resilience of Christians in Kaduna affirms that persecution does not silence the gospel but amplifies it through sacrificial witness. Ultimately, the hope of believers rests not only in overcoming present insecurity but in the eschatological assurance of God's justice, where the blood of martyrs becomes a seed for renewed faith, mission, and growth.

Recommendations

i. Churches in Kaduna State should develop structured pastoral care and trauma healing programs to support victims of violence. Training clergy and lay counselors in psychological

first aid and spiritual resilience will help restore hope, reduce trauma, and nurture long-term healing.

ii. Christian leaders should deepen collaboration with Muslim counterparts through dialogue, joint community projects, and peacebuilding initiatives. This will reduce tensions, dismantle stereotypes, and foster reconciliation, thereby creating safer spaces for coexistence.

iii. Sustainable empowerment initiatives such as vocational training, education, and small-scale businesses should be prioritized to restore dignity and economic stability. By reducing dependency and poverty, the church can build resilience against insecurity and promote holistic development.

iv. Churches, in partnership with civil society, should intensify advocacy efforts to hold government and security agencies accountable for protecting lives and property. This includes engaging in policy dialogue, promoting good governance, and demanding the prosecution of perpetrators of violence.

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THE CHRISTIAN IMPERATIVE OF FORGIVENESS: A STUDY OF BIBLICAL TEACHINGS

By

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Abstract:
Forgiveness is a fundamental concept in Christian theology, emphasized throughout the Bible as a crucial aspect of the Christian faith. In Christianity of present time, forgiveness is preached, but not practiced. This has become a menace in the body of Christ, it has gendered segregation and proliferation of Christian denominations. Deficiency of forgiveness in the body of Christ has created uncountable crises both spiritually and physically. Therefore, this study explores the biblical teachings on forgiveness, examining its significance, nature, and implications for Christian living. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant biblical passages, this research demonstrates that forgiveness is not merely a human virtue but a divine imperative, rooted in God's character and redemptive plan. The study investigates the various dimensions of forgiveness, including God's forgiveness of humanity, interpersonal forgiveness among believers, and the forgiveness of self. This research also examines the biblical prerequisites for forgiveness, such as repentance, confession, and restitution, as well as the consequences of unforgiveness. Furthermore, it discusses the challenges and complexities of forgiveness in real-life situations, offering practical insights and guidance for Christians seeking to embody the forgiveness of God. Ultimately, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the Christian imperative of forgiveness, and recommending believers to cultivate a culture of forgiveness in their personal lives, relationships, and communities. The researcher adopted analytical research method to communicate his thoughts on the research topic.
***Keywords**: Christian, Imperative, Forgiveness, Study, Biblical, Teachings*

Introduction

Forgiveness is a universal human need, yet it remains one of the most difficult and complex aspects of human relationships. The ability to forgive oneself and others is essential for emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being. However, the process of forgiveness can be fraught with challenges, particularly when confronted with deep-seated hurts, injustices, and betrayals. In the face of such adversity, the Christian faith offers a unique perspective on forgiveness, one that is rooted in the character and redemptive plan of God. At the heart of Christian theology lies the conviction that God is a forgiving God, who desires to reconcile humanity to Himself through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This fundamental truth has far-reaching implications for human relationships, as believers are called to embody the forgiveness of God in their interactions with others. The Bible teaches that forgiveness is not merely a human virtue, but a divine imperative, essential for maintaining healthy relationships, fostering personal growth, and promoting communal harmony.

Despite its importance, forgiveness remains a poorly understood and often neglected aspect of Christian discipleship. Many believers struggle to forgive themselves and others, leading to emotional turmoil, spiritual stagnation, and relational breakdown. The consequences of unforgiveness can be devastating, causing hurt, anger, and resentment to simmer beneath the surface, ultimately destroying relationships and communities. In recent years, the topic of forgiveness has garnered significant attention in various fields, including psychology, sociology,

and philosophy. While these disciplines offer valuable insights into the human experience of forgiveness, they often neglect the unique theological and biblical dimensions of forgiveness. This study seeks to address this lacuna by exploring the biblical teachings on forgiveness, examining its significance, nature, and implications for Christian living. Through a comprehensive analysis of relevant biblical passages, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the Christian imperative of forgiveness. By examining the biblical concept of forgiveness in its historical, cultural, and theological context, this study hopes to shed light on the complexities and challenges of forgiveness, as well as its transformative power to heal, restore, and redeem. Ultimately, this research seeks to encourage believers to cultivate a culture of forgiveness in their personal lives, relationships, and communities, embodying the forgiveness of God in a world torn apart by conflict, division, and hurt.

Conceptual Clarification

Conceptual clarification is the process of defining and refining abstract concepts, ideas, or terms to ensure precision, accuracy, and shared understanding. It involves analyzing and distinguishing between related concepts, identifying ambiguities, and establishing clear boundaries and definitions. This helps to prevent confusion, miscommunication, and misinterpretation. The following are the keywords as contained in the title of the research work; Christian, Imperative, Forgiveness, Study, Biblical, Teachings.

1. Christian

A Christian refers to an individual who adheres to the teachings and principles of Christianity, a monotheistic Abrahamic religion based on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (McGrath, 2017, p. 12). Christians believe in the Bible as the inspired word of God and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as recorded in the New Testament. The term "Christian" encompasses a broad range of denominations, traditions, and interpretations, but at its core, it signifies a commitment to following Jesus Christ and living according to His teachings.

2. Imperative

An imperative is a moral or ethical principle that is considered obligatory or mandatory (Kant, 1785/2012, p. 30). In the context of Christian theology, an imperative refers to a divine command or principle that is binding on believers. Imperatives are often used to convey a sense of urgency, necessity, or moral obligation. In the context of forgiveness, the imperative of forgiveness suggests that forgiveness is not optional, but rather a necessary response to wrongdoing.

3. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the process of letting go of negative emotions, such as anger, resentment, and bitterness, in response to a perceived wrongdoing or hurt (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015, p. 10). Forgiveness involves a willingness to release the offender from the debt of hurt or wrongdoing, and to work towards healing and reconciliation. Forgiveness is not the same as forgetting, condoning, or excusing wrongdoing, but rather a conscious decision to release the negative emotions associated with the hurt.

4. Study

A study refers to a systematic and detailed examination or investigation of a subject or topic (Creswell, 2014, p. 3). In the context of academic research, a study involves the collection and analysis of data to answer research questions or test hypotheses. Studies can employ various methodologies, including qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. The goal of a study is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on a particular topic and to provide insights that can inform practice, policy, or future research.

5. Biblical

Biblical means something that is related to or based on the Bible, which is the sacred scripture of the Christian faith (Brueggemann, 2003, p. 12). The Bible is a collection of writings that are considered authoritative and inspired by God. Biblical teachings, stories, and themes have had a profound impact on Western culture and continue to shape the beliefs and practices of millions of people around the world.

6. Teachings

Teachings refer to the principles, doctrines, or instructions that are conveyed through a particular text, tradition, or authority (Fiorenza, 2009, p. 15). In the context of religious studies, teachings often refer to the doctrines or principles that are derived from sacred texts, such as the Bible or the Quran. Teachings can provide guidance for living, moral principles, and spiritual practices, and they often shape the beliefs and practices of individuals and communities.

This keyword clarification provides a foundational framework for understanding the subject matter. By establishing a shared understanding of key concepts, this guide aims to facilitate deeper comprehension and meaningful engagement among readers and scholars, ultimately enriching the broader academic discourse.

Biblical Teachings on Forgiveness

Biblical teachings on forgiveness emphasize the importance of forgiving others as a reflection of God's mercy. In the Old Testament, forgiveness is closely tied to the covenant relationship between God and His people. Forgiveness in the Old Testament was rooted in God's character as merciful and just (Oyedepo, 2014, p. 15). For instance, God instructed the Israelites to forgive debts and release those who had been wronged (Leviticus 19:18, *New International Version NIV* Oyedepo, 2014, p. 15). Forgiveness in the Old Testament often focused on the restoration of relationships and the importance of individuals repenting for their sins (Bediako, 2004, p. 23). The concept of forgiving others as God forgives was central to Israel's religious practice (Exodus 34:6-7, *NIV* Bediako, 2004, p. 23).

The Old Testament Perspective on Forgiveness

The Old Testament perspective on forgiveness highlights the significance of repentance, divine mercy, and the establishment of a just society. Forgiveness is described as essential for maintaining communal harmony (Tutu, 2003, p. 48). Forgiveness required a response of repentance from those who had sinned (Leviticus 26:40-42, *NIV* Tutu, 2003, p.48). In the context of Israel's covenant relationship with God, forgiveness was not only an act of grace but also a communal responsibility. Forgiveness was seen as a way to restore the broken relationship between God and His people, fostering justice and reconciliation (Adeyemo, 2000, p. 67).

The New Testament Perspective on Forgiveness

In the New Testament, forgiveness is central to Jesus' teachings, focusing on grace, love, and the unconditional nature of forgiveness. Jesus emphasized the need to forgive others as God forgives (Mbiti, 2006, p. 112). Jesus says, "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14-15, *NIV* Mbiti, 2006, p. 112). Jesus' parables, such as the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant, highlight the importance of forgiving others from the heart (Matthew 18:21-35, *NIV* Mbiti, 2006, p. 113). Forgiveness in the New Testament extends to all people, including enemies, promoting reconciliation and love (Nze, 2015, p. 89).

Jesus' Teachings on Forgiveness

Jesus' teachings on forgiveness emphasize the need for believers to extend mercy and forgiveness to others, reflecting God's character. Jesus often stressed the importance of forgiveness as a way to maintain peace and restore relationships (Adeboye, 2010, p. 54). Jesus exemplifies this by forgiving those who crucified Him, praying, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34, *NIV* Adeboye, 2010, p. 54). Jesus' teachings go beyond the boundaries of the Law, calling for a lifestyle of forgiveness that reflects divine love and mercy (Asamoah-Gyadu, 2011, p. 78).

Theological Perspectives on Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a central theme in many theological frameworks, and African theologians have significantly contributed to its understanding by drawing on biblical principles and cultural contexts. From a theological perspective, forgiveness is viewed as a divine mandate and a path to reconciliation with God and others. Forgiveness is fundamental in healing societal wounds, especially in post-apartheid South Africa (Tutu, 1999, p. 272). Tutu writes, "Forgiveness liberates both the forgiver and the forgiven, enabling a future where relationships can be restored" (Tutu, 1999, p. 272). This perspective highlights forgiveness not merely as an individual act but as a communal and restorative process. Additionally, African theology intertwines forgiveness with *ubuntu* a concept that underscores interdependence and shared humanity. *Ubuntu* shapes the theological discourse on forgiveness, moving beyond retributive justice to embrace restorative justice, where forgiveness becomes a moral and spiritual duty (Louw, 2015, p. 87). Moreover, forgiveness mirrors God's unconditional love and mercy (Mugambi, 2003, p. 45). Mugambi notes, "In the African Christian context, forgiveness is both a theological virtue and a moral necessity for peace and cohesion" (Mugambi, 2003, p. 45). Forgiveness requires humility and a commitment to reconciliation, reflecting Christ's teachings in the Gospels. African theological perspectives on forgiveness reveal a dynamic interplay between biblical teachings and cultural values, underscoring its importance for personal, communal, and societal transformation. These insights enrich global theological discussions and demonstrate how forgiveness is deeply rooted in the lived realities and spiritual traditions of African communities.

The Christian Imperative of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a central tenet of Christian faith, deeply rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is not merely an emotional response but a deliberate act of will, modeled after God's forgiveness of humanity through the sacrifice of Christ. Scripture emphasizes forgiveness as a necessary condition for spiritual harmony, as Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer: "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12, *NIV)*. Forgiveness transcends personal grievances and serves as a pathway to communal reconciliation and divine peace (Volf, 2010, p. 125). This imperative is echoed in Paul's writings, where believers are urged to forgive as Christ forgave them (Colossians 3:13). Beyond individual relationships, forgiveness embodies the Christian call to imitate God's mercy, challenging believers to embrace humility and compassion. Forgiveness fosters spiritual growth and unity within the Christian community (Lapsley & Simpson, 2019, p. 78). Ultimately, forgiveness is both a gift received from God and a practice demanded of Christians as they embody Christ's redemptive love in their lives.

Theological Foundations of Forgiveness

The theology of forgiveness is anchored in God's nature as a forgiving deity and in Christ's atoning work on the cross. Forgiveness is intrinsic to God's covenant with humanity, revealing His grace and desire for reconciliation (Barth, 1956, p. 34). Theologically, forgiveness is not a mere act of condoning wrongdoing but a transformative process that restores relationships and aligns human actions with divine will. The cost of forgiveness, exemplified in Christ's suffering, underscores its profound significance and sacredness (Bonhoeffer, 1995, p. 90). Forgiveness is eschatological, pointing toward the ultimate reconciliation of all creation with God (McGrath, 2017, p. 112). These theological underpinnings shape Christian ethics and offer believers a framework for navigating the complexities of forgiveness in personal and communal contexts as follow.

1. The Imperative of Forgiveness in Christian Living

Forgiveness in Christian life is both a moral obligation and a spiritual discipline. It reflects obedience to Christ's command to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44, *NIV*. Forgiveness is challenging yet indispensable for genuine Christian discipleship

(Lewis, 1942, p. 61). In practice, forgiveness is inseparable from love and justice, emphasizing its role in addressing social inequalities and fostering systemic reconciliation (Cone, 1975, p. 103). Forgiveness liberates individuals from the destructive power of resentment, allowing them to experience divine freedom (Smedes, 1984, p. 49). By forgiving, Christians participate in God's redemptive work, extending His grace to others and embodying the kingdom values in everyday life.

2. Overcoming Obstacles to Forgivenes

Despite its significance, forgiveness is fraught with challenges, including deep-seated anger, betrayal, and a desire for retribution. Anger is a natural response to pain, but it must be transformed to achieve forgiveness (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 153). The importance of acknowledging and addressing injustice is a prerequisite for genuine forgiveness (Tutu, 1999, p. 67). Forgiveness requires humility and courage to relinquish the power of judgment and entrust justice to God (Volf, 2006, p. 144). Practical strategies for overcoming these obstacles include prayer, meditation on Scripture, and seeking support from the Christian community. Ultimately, the journey toward forgiveness is an act of faith, rooted in the belief that God's grace empowers believers to overcome human limitations and reflect His love in their lives.

Psychological and Social Implications of Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a complex psychological process that involves the intentional decision to release feelings of resentment or vengeance toward a person who has caused harm, regardless of whether they deserve it. From a psychological perspective, forgiveness is associated with significant emotional and mental health benefits, including reduced anxiety, depression, and stress. Forgiveness enhances psychological resilience by promoting emotional stability, fostering personal growth, and improving overall well-being (Oladipo, 2012, p. 58). These findings highlight the critical role of forgiveness in mitigating the adverse effects of emotional trauma and creating pathways to mental recovery. On a social level, forgiveness plays a pivotal role in mending interpersonal relationships and fostering communal harmony. Forgiveness strengthens community bonds by addressing conflicts and fostering reconciliation, thereby ensuring societal cohesion (Ezeanya, 2018, p. 113). This perspective aligns with the African communal philosophy, which underscores the interconnectedness of individuals within their social environment.

Furthermore, the practice of forgiveness has broader implications for societal stability and collective healing. In contexts marked by historical grievances or intergroup conflicts, forgiveness can serve as a transformative tool for achieving lasting peace. Forgiveness initiatives have been employed in post-conflict settings in Nigeria, such as the Niger Delta region, to facilitate healing, rebuild trust, and prevent the recurrence of violence (Okoye, 2020, p. 202). Such interventions underscore the power of forgiveness in addressing structural injustices and creating sustainable avenues for coexistence. Forgiveness is a multifaceted concept with profound psychological and social implications. While it fosters individual emotional well-being, it also contributes to the restoration of interpersonal and communal relationships, highlighting its significance in promoting holistic recovery and societal stability.

Conclusion

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith, reflecting the character of God and the transformative power of grace. This study has explored the biblical imperative of forgiveness, emphasizing its theological and practical significance. From the Old Testament's depiction of divine mercy to the New Testament's portrayal of Christ's sacrificial love, forgiveness emerges as a divine mandate for believers, grounded in the reality of God's forgiveness toward humanity. The teachings of Jesus underscore forgiveness as an indispensable element of Christian discipleship. For instance, Jesus' instruction to forgive "seventy times seven" (Matthew 18:22) illustrates the boundless nature of Christian forgiveness (Onah, 2019, p. 45). Similarly, Paul's exhortations to the early church emphasize forgiveness as a unifying force within Christian communities, as noted by Adejumo, who argues that forgiveness fosters reconciliation and strengthens communal bonds

(2020, p. 78). Moreover, the study highlights the practical challenges of forgiveness, acknowledging that it often demands divine empowerment. Genuine forgiveness requires a heart transformed by God's love, enabling believers to let go of resentment and embrace peace (Eze, 2021, p. 102). While forgiveness does not negate justice, it calls Christians to embody mercy and pursue reconciliation in a broken world. Finally, the Christian imperative of forgiveness is a profound testament to the transformative power of grace. By embracing forgiveness, believers not only align themselves with God's will but also become agents of healing and restoration. This divine mandate, rooted in biblical teachings, calls Christians to reflect God's love in their relationships and communities, demonstrating that forgiveness is not just a command but a way of life.

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FRACTURED MASCULINITIES IN SOYINKA'S *THE TRIAL OF BROTHER JERO*

By

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Abstract

Man is constructed to be strong, macho, emotionless and strong. The notion that a man does not cry, stems from his social construction which is a function of the definition of what it means to be a man in his social milieu. Masculinity is constructed across different strata of life and these include class, race, ethnicity, age and profession. It bothers on the roles assigned to the boy child in a particular social environment and the status he assumes as he grows to become a man according to the dictates of the societal norms. Every member of the society, mothers inclusive, understands these roles and statuses as the minimum standard for which a man is understood to be a man indeed. He is therefore expected to act socially, economically and emotionally even when he lacks the capacity to do so. The construction gambit, however, becomes fractured in the face of realities of existence and challenges to those things that define him as a man. Using constructionist model, this study therefore investigates the fracturing of man's social construction and the challenges of coping with the redefinition of manhood. The study employed qualitative approach which involves literary text analysis of Soyinka's The Trial of Brother Jero to reveal subordinated masculinities, social castration and the helplessness of the male characters devoid of economic power and emotional stability to act as real men. Finding reveals that man becomes vulnerable when his construction is contrary to the actual performance as a provider and head of the family. It was therefore suggested that parents, especially mothers, should raise boys and girls the same way as they grow to become adult members of the society.

Keywords: Construction, Masculinities, Manhood, Enactment, Status.

Introduction

Fractured masculinity in African context refers to the challenges and complexities African men face in enacting traditional masculine form and exhibiting masculine traits which make them vulnerable socially, emotionally and psychologically. The traditional African man is constructed as a bread winner, head of the family, emotionless, macho and strong. In many African socio-cultural contexts, masculinity is associated strength, power, dominance, good fatherhood and provider roles which put a lot of pressure on the male personality because of societal expectations. These societal expectations fused into the construction of masculinity can be damaging with the capacity to lead to some feelings of inadequacy and fear of not being called weak. According to Bell Hooks (2004), the complexities and crisis are not particularly about men but the effects traditional masculinity has on relationship, especially heterosexual relationship and the society that constructs men. Masculinity is, therefore, fractured when the male personality becomes vulnerable as a result of his inability to conform to the definition of who a real man is in a social context or fails to meet up with societal expectations. Part of the social construction of the male gender is that he must not show emotion even when he is overwhelmed. Dan Kindlon (1999) corroborates this when he says that the lives of men are usually defined by the societal expectations that construct him as strong and stoic. Terrence Real (1997 believes that men are socialized not only to be strong but independent and that these socialization can also be a source of sorrow, pain and isolation. However, Ika Fatmawati (2025)

opines that contrary to the notion of "Iron John", men are discovered to "construct emotional masculinity where men are shown crying, hurting, and openly expressing vulnerability"p.18

Men operate at different levels of hierarchies in role performance and status exhibition in masculinities discourse. Subordinated masculinity is defined by other masculinities that exclude men from the general and homogenous definition of what it takes to be a complete man (Kimmel & Messner 1995:p.xxi). Subordinated masculinity is the lowest in masculinity hierarchy because it is not the standard in which other masculinities are defined in a social setting. Men use different criteria to rank themselves according to the cultural dictates of each society such that anyone who is unable to measure up to acceptable ranking is seen to be emasculated or subordinated. Kimmel in *Theorizing Masculinities* contends that the "definition of manhood continues to remain the standard against which other forms of manhood are measured and evaluated" (p.124). Raewyn Connell (2005) while examining the social construction of masculinity posits that it is a complex concept with multiple forms and different intersections with other social factors. The implication of this is that the outlook of the masculinity of men holding power defined as hegemonic, clearly defines those who do not as subordinated.

Citing "complete", 'unblushing' American male, Goffman (1963) says ''he is married, white, urban, northern heterosexual, protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion" (p.128) among other status and traits that validate him as a real man. That is the norm that categorizes others as deviants such that "anyone who fails to qualify in any one of these ways is likely to view himself… as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior" (p.128). These are the men enacting a variant of masculinity at the lowest rung of the ladder. This kind of personality is not made overnight but through a process of development. For instance, some of the factors that emasculate the man are internalized in the process of the child's growth under the care of the mother. The mother, Kimmel (1994) says, "represents the humiliation of infancy, helplessness dependency" (p.127) and other feminine behavioural orientation considered inconsistent with the traits and behaviour of real men.

Subordinated men are confronted with the reality of how the privileges of the hegemonic masculinities continue in many respects to subordinate them. As a result of this reality, it becomes imperative for these men to begin to depart from the traditional view of masculinity. Kimmel argues that:

> enacting 'problematic' or 'deviant' versions of masculinity...a theoretical assertion…reproduced precisely the power relationship that keep men in subordinate positions in our society (p.xix)

Masculinity is constructed in different ways according to the social dictates of the cultural environment where the man is raised or socialized. Masculinities can, therefore, be fractured along the following lines of divides; the heterosexual men, against gay/lesbian, the hegemonic men against the marginalized, the hegemonic against the subordinated, white against the men of color. Although these masculinities are constructed differently, they represent a binary fixture of those that fit in against those who do not.

O'Neil and Nadeau 1999 citing Kahn 1994 conclude that

> Giving up power and control would appear unmanly, feminine, and pose threats to their masculine gender role identity. Some men traditionally equate loss of power and control with a loss of masculinity. It is well known that when men lose power, they are more likely to use abuse and violence to compensate for the loss. p.103

No doubt, loss of control translates to loss of masculinity, which in turn defines the experiences of a fractured construction of male characters. It suggests failure in the performance of roles ascribed to him as a provider who supposed to be in charge. This, no doubt, makes the man vulnerable with a feeling of inadequacy and it is a recipe for disaster which often leads to violence (Jackson Katz,

2006). It is one of the challenges man faces in the process of becoming the true definition of his socio-cultural construction and this traditional masculine role according to Herb Goldberg (1976) makes masculine role not only very tight but narrow, limiting and crippling.

Method and Framework for the Study

This study employs qualitative approach which involves textual and critical analyses with particular focus on the utilization of subordinated masculinity and perfomativity as tools to explore power relationships and emotional performance among characters in Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero*. This is in agreement with Judith Butler (1990) who posits that masculinity is a performance that requires constant effort to maintain. The foregrounding of fractured construction of masculinities in a modern setting and representation of vulnerable male character in a heterosexual relationship informed the choice of *The Trial of Brother Jero*. Therefore, the major data here is *The Trial of Brother Jero* interpreted based on the social context of the Yoruba, Nigerian people of West Africa and taking into consideration changes in economic status of men to establish a fracturing of their social construction. The approach was adopted to explore the social, symbolic and psychological representation of identified male characters on the one hand and to establish the symbiotic relationship between literary text and social structure. The analysis was carried out by identifying characters central to the fracturing of male construction using relevant excerpts from the text.

Social Constructionist Model for the Study

This research relies on Social Constructionist Model for the identification and understanding of male characters made subservient to female character in the play to underscore the psychological trauma the man suffers contrary to his masculine social construction. The Social Constructionist Model posits that masculinity varies from one culture to another and with any culture at a given time, and not universal culturally and historically. This presupposes that what makes male gender men in a particular cultural environment is significantly different from what makes male different in other climes because of cultural, historical and social differences over a period of time. In China, what makes males men in early 16th Century is different from what makes them men in Ghana in the same period of time. So the meaning of masculinity is culturally defined and it differs from one culture to this other. Even within a culture, masculinity assumes different meaning in the process of time because it is a changing phenomenon (Jegede 2024).

Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner (1995) opine that Social Constructionist Model also differs in the way masculinity is enacted along historical divide within a culture. This means that even within a culture so many factors can be identified as differing events that define masculinity in that culture. Social Constructionist Model establishes that masculinity is constructed differently by race, culture, ethnicity, class and age. In America, for instance, White masculinity is different from Black masculinity. WEB DU Bois believes the masculinity of the Black man is that which is burdened by double yoke—race and class. By recognizing the matrix of masculinities, the social constructionists identify different shades of masculinity hierarchies among men across different culture, class, age and ethnicity.

Verbal Abuse as Sign of Fractured Masculinities in Soyinka's *The Trial of Brother Jero*

Verbal abuse, castration anxiety and diminishing self-esteem usually activate violence as defence mechanism in effete men who struggle with the validation of their manhood. The question has always been what social dynamic will make a man lose his self-worth and struggle to do what will validate his manhood even before his own wife? For Chume, many factors such as religious manipulation, his gullibility, economic disability and socio-cultural construct subordinate him to Amope who spares no word to demean and castrate him. Castration in this context refers to male characters created but devoid of masculine traits and sex roles that validate them as men. Like a castrated animal, the male character is psychologically injured either by the weakness of his economic and political power or demeaned by verbal assault that strips him of his manhood. The

religious dimension to the issue of emasculation stems from Jero's selfish manipulation of Chume, his disciple, in order to keep him permanently as a member. Jero takes advantage of Chume's gullibility to indoctrinate him. His faith in the prophet's ability to ensure for him career success makes Chume a faithful follower of the prophet.

Again, because of Amope's tendency to make Chume subservient and subordinated, he has several times sought permission to beat her. This request is not granted by the prophet who for selfish reason thinks that any time Chume beats his wife, he might lose him as a member and faithful disciple. Added to this is Jero's promise that Chume will succeed him in the church. Jero says:

> This is the son whom you appointed to follow in my foot step. Soften his heart. Brother Chume, this woman whom you so desire to beat is your cross-bear it well. She is your heaven-sent trial-lay not your hands on her. I command you to speak no harsh word to her. Pray, Brother Chume, for strength in this hour of your trial. Pray for strength and fortitude. p. 24

Jero tactically reminds him of his promise that Chume will be his successor in order to sustain his faithfulness and loyalty. Above all, the promise is for the selfish motive of keeping Chume emotionally dependent on him. With all these indoctrination and attachment to Jero, Chume becomes emasculated through religious instrument. This is why he will not beat his wife because she is his cross and trial from heaven. Chume remains subservient to his wife who sends him on errand like a small boy because of 'spiritual abstinence.'

Chume's vulnerability makes him a victim of Amope's socio-cultural emasculation. His masculinity becomes fractured as a result of religious and emotional manipulation by Jero. Chume's manipulation and indoctrination arise from spiritual counsel from Jero who uses his complaint about Amope's verbal assault as a bait to keep him perpetually loyal.

Chume enacts hypo-masculinity traits because of his inability to live up to his masculine construction as a provider and head of his family. Hypo-masculinity is the masculinity enactment of men who are weak, helpless, effete and incapable of supporting a family (Kimmel 2005). This is the reality which a victim of fractured masculinity struggles with that predisposes him to certain dysfunctional behaviours like battering and violence. Chume is not only conscious of this but is constantly reminded by Amope, in her usual refrain. "I do my best for you…."

Chume epitomises the character portraiture of a man enacting his masculinity at the lowest rung of the social ladder. His description says little about him until Amope begins her verbal abuse without any provocation because of sudden application of the brake that causes a jolt:

> (....The rider is a shortish man; his feet hardly touch the pedals. On the crossbar is a woman; the cross bar itself is wound round with a mat, and on the carrier is a large travelling sack, with a woman's household stool hanging from a corner of it). p.11-12

This vivid description is important as it helps to locate Chume and his wife Amope on the social ladder such that their economic status leaves no one in doubt. His social status is equally very low. Even Jero attests to the fact that Chume is 'crude' p.22. Again, the picture of a man and his wife on a bicycle with "household stool hanging from a comer of it" p.22, going to lay a siege on a customer who owes a paltry one pound, eight shillings and nine pence gives credence to their poor lifestyle.

Chume presents the image of not just an effete man but a thoroughly domesticated husband in spite of the fact that he works in a local government office. Amope gets offended as he applies the brake rather suddenly. She takes it on him, in a way that suggests that the man is a failure. Chume's helplessness is obvious when Amope says

(*her tone of martyrdom is easy, accustomed to use*) I suppose we all do our best, but after all these years one would think you could set me down a little more gently p.12.

Chume's attempt to explain that he is never given enough notice only aggravates the issue and gives Amope an opportunity to tongue-lash him like a little boy. This is evidence of a fractured masculinity as Chume is not better than an errand boy in the circumstance where his wife combines verbal assault with the abuse of his manhood.

Chume's servile nature makes him an instrument in Amope's hands. She seems to enjoy sending him about. The following conversational dialogue give Chume out as a subdued man. Amope says, "The way you complain – anybody who didn't see what happened would think you were the one that broke an ankle" p. 12. (*she has already begun to limp)*. Chume replies, "Don't tell me that was enough to break your ankle". Amope becomes abusive: "Break. You didn't hear me complain. You did your best, but if my toes are to be broken one by one just because I have to monkey on your bicycle, you must admit it's a tough life for a woman" p.12

Amope's deliberate use of words, of course is meant to demean her husband. This is what Bagshaw (2000a) refers to as emotional and verbal abuse chief of which is "put downs". Put down is a psychological violence which means to "disparage, belittle, criticize, disapprove of a person, to make that person ineffective" (O'Neil, J.M and Egan, J. 1992:77). Amope's substitution of the word "climb'' or ''ride on'' for "monkey" *on your bicycle* in the dialogue above is a biting invective meant do demean Chume as a poor, wretched man. Again for effect, she says such act (that is poverty-stricken lifestyle) is a ''tough life for a woman". Reminding Chume of his weak economic and social condition is not better than a woman's act of taunting a castrated man. She mocks his financial weakness. She provokes in the man sense of failure that reminds him of his numerous struggles and helplessness. Chume has hardly uttered a word when Amope tells him: "Yes, you did your best. I know. Didn't I admit it? Please …. Give me that stool.…" p.12

Amope leaves no one in doubt that between him and Chume, the table has turned as regards who plays the breadwinner role. All attempts by Chume to show some affection and care are not appreciated rather Amope demonstrates that she is the one in charge. When asked whether she should be taken home because of her ankle, she replies as one talking to her subordinate: "I can look after myself. I've always done, and looked after you too. Just help me unload the things and place them against the wall….. You know I wouldn't ask if it wasn't for the ankle." p.13

Amope's revelation above confirms the shift of sex role from the husband to the wife. The implication is that Chume has not been opportune to take up such a noble responsibility of being a breadwinner, a role cherished by every man. Rather, it is Amope that has always done it. The implication is that Chume is worthless as a man in this context. Her assumption of the provider role naturally provides ground for Chume's fractured masculinity experience. Consequently, he becomes the one in charge of the domestic affairs as dictated by his wife.

By engaging him at the domestic sphere, Amope is sending a signal, subtle though, by her action that power resides with her. This is a sign of subordination and helplessness that manifests in the way Amope orders him around: "Please give me that stool. p.12, just help me unload the things and place them against the wall, p.13; You haven't let the soup pour out, have you?" p.13; "careful…careful now … the cork nearly come off that bottle p.13; Do, I beg you, take better care of that Jar p.13.

When masculinity is fractured, the male victim loses control and by extension sense of worth. There is no doubting the fact that Chume has lost power and control in the relationship, the very basis of his gender role identity. Such experience of vulnerability is dangerous for both the male and female characters in a heterogeneous relationship because in the event of loss of control, the man is likely to resort to violence. For instance, Chume throws a wrapper on the floor to show some exasperation for Amope's debasing treatment of him like a little boy. After all, in a typical

African setting, the woman is to idolize her husband. Of course, the demeaned man remembers with nostalgia how he loses control and bemoans his helpless condition. Just a little resentment and Amope begins her verbal humiliation that reminds him of his frustration and dejection. She says:

> Abuse me. All right go on, begin to abuse me.
> You know that all I asked was if the soup had poured away, and it isn't as if that was something no one ever asked before. I would do it all myself if it wasn't for my ankle. Anyone would think it was my fault…. careful …. Careful now…. The cork nearly come off that bottle. You know how difficult it is to get any water in this place. p.13

The male victim of fractured masculinity is never appreciated largely because of his effete, weak and unmanly disposition. Chume fights his shame and humiliation internally because his sense of enervation is not a matter for the physical exercise of power, although his physiology, as a shortish man, may be a disadvantage. However, what subjects him to the debasing condition is a combination of so many psychosocial factors such as poor economic power, religious manipulation and low social status.

He has lost his dignity, honour and respect in the process. It must be noted, that Chume has not forgotten that he is a man – although without the compliments of manliness.

There lies the danger in fractured masculinity – the man has not forgotten that he is born male and has been trained to be a 'man' in the socio-cultural environment where he grows to become a man, only that he lacks what it takes to exercise that gender-role. Therefore "when there is a threat to a man's power or control from a woman, specific defense mechanisms may be activated." (O'Neil and Nadeau 1999:103). No wonder, Chume continues to pester Prophet Jero to allow him to beat his wife "just once". This request as a matter of fact, remains for Chume the only hope, psychologically, for him to salvage his battered manhood and reassert his masculinity. Even Jero is not unaware of this great desire. After the humiliation at her debtors' (Jero) house where he takes her, Chume quickly returns to the church to ask for permission to beat his wife: *Chume, silent for a while, then bursts out suddenly*. Brother Jero, you must let me beat her! Jero says 'What?' but "Chume (*desperate*) Just once, Prophet, Just once." Jero retorts: Apostate. Have I not told you the will of God in this matter? Chume insists "But I've got to beat her, Prophet. You must save me from madness." p.22

To the effect that he might go "mad" further shows the danger inherent in bottled emotion which is usually at the root of fractured masculinity always waiting to explode. Beating Amope to Chume promises freedom and restoration of lost masculinity and its attendant privileges. Despite Jero's caution and name-calling – apostate, Lucifer - he continues to mount pressure that he may be allowed to beat his wife. He says "I no go beat 'am too hard. Just once, small small p. 23. Just one time. I no go ask again. Just do me this one favour, make a beat 'am today" p.23. Assaulting his wife, is Chume's own defence mechanism not only to protect his gender-role identity but to ''help him with his feelings of loss, vulnerability, shame, anger and/or inadequacy as a man." p.103 Chume's subordinating condition is unpleasant and agonizing such that when Jero will not grant his permission, he resigns to fate in emotion-laden voice characteristics of an effeminate fellow "My life is hell …." p.23

Of course, life will have the similitude of hell when rehearsal is quite different from performance. This is the point of conflict in the psychological frame of mind of the man socially and economically rendered enervated by the contradictions between his social construct as a man and the actual performance of his masculine gender role. This gender-role conflict drives a man to a psychological state in which the gender-role that he is socialized begins to have negative consequences not only on him but on others. This usually occurs when ''rigid, sexist or restricted gender-role" causes devaluation or self-violation or the violation of others (O'Neil and Nadeau 1999: 99.)

One of the consequences of gender-role conflict is heterosexual antagonism which results from "crude and critical comments from the (females) girls about one's "masculine physique, intelligence or personality" p. 99. Women who critically comment on a man's lack of strength, sexual potency or skill can threaten a man's gender-role identity and stimulate gender-role conflict. A man's personal experience with gender-role conflict can also be psychologically painful. p. 99

Amope's use of words is deliberately targeted at Chume's soul and usually a sad reminder of his social and economic disabilities. She knows how to make those words painful by comparing Chume as a failure to a known successful man like the minister or the sanitary inspector. Most times, the psychological pain resulting from uncomplimentary, crude and critical comment by one's wife or any woman for that matter has debilitating effect on the man's psyche. It usually stimulates low self-esteem, depression; unassertiveness and psychological castration that make a man feel empty and worthless. This is a fracturing that predisposes men to violence against women or self-violation such as abuse of drug or suicide.

Fracturing of male masculinity suggests social impotence, castration, lack of virility and socio-economic vitality comparable to a medical condition called erectile dysfunction. Castration by its very nature is the removal of the testicles medically while enervation is the result of castration, a psychological deprivation, lack of virility and self-worth. A socially and psychological castrated man sees himself as a failure and may activate strong, negative emotions such as fear, guilt, anger, shame, loss, self-protective defences against women or other men.

Amope has made unpleasant comments about Chume in the past, especially about his forgetfulness and the fact that she is performing the breadwinner role but the most demeaning are those directed at his person, poor lifestyle and low occupational prestige. She says:

> You've forgotten the mat. I know it's not much, but I would like something to sleep on. There are women who sleep in beds of course, but I'm not complaining…. They are just lucky with their husband, and we can't all be lucky I suppose. p.14

Chume replies: "You've got a bed at home" to which Amope thundered "And so I'm to leave my work undone. My trade is to suffer because I have a bed at home? Thank God I am not the kind of women who…." p.14

Amope seizes every opportunity to demean Chume with her words that not only put him down but humiliate him. The mat is just another opportunity to remind him that he is poor and unlucky. She uses the bed in this circumstance as a signifier of affluence while the mat symbolizes poverty. This is heterosexual antagonism that makes a man feel empty and inadequate. She is about reminding him again, that she does not complain like other women, of course, that she is the bread winner.

Chume's low occupational prestige as a chief messenger in the local government receives his wife's comment at the slight mention of "my office" or "I am going to my office". She devalues him and his work in a way that inflicts in him psychological injury that makes him feel ashamed of his low occupational prestige. After settling her down in front of her debtor's house, Chume says he will be late for work and Amope says:

> I know you can't wait to get away. You only use your work as an excuse. A Chief Messenger in the local government office – do you call that work? Your old school friends are now ministers, riding in long cars …. p.14.

Heterosexual antagonism can be traumatizing for a man, especially when he does not have the capacity to change the situation. She says his position as a chief messenger is no work, makes him psychologically impotent, as much as being reminded that his school mates are riding in long cars. This assault on his manhood leaves Chume with no option than to *get on his bike and flee* p.14. As he flees from her, she hollers, like a man will call after a messenger; "Don't forget to bring some more water when you are returning from work." pp.14-15. Talking to herself while he has gone,

Amope reveals her resentment for his job as the Chief Messenger. This she blames on Chume's complacency:

> …(*she relapses and sighs heavily*) He doesn't realize it is for his own good. He's no worse than other men but he won't make the effort to become something in life. A Chief Messenger. Am I to go to my grave as the wife of a Chief Messenger? p.15

The demeaning of a man's self-worth, especially the one that cherishes his gender-role identity is a fall out of a masculinity that has been fractured in a social milieu. Her uncomplimentary comments set Chume on edge that he seeks Prophet Jero's permission to beat her. So when Jero says he may not beat her, ostensibly for selfish reason, he becomes more frustrated with such emotional outbursts as *My life is a hell* p.23 and *This woman will kill me* …. p. 24. Emotional trauma such as this predisposes a man to violence and dysfunctional behaviours which are direct results of fractured masculinity. Chume carries the stigma of devaluation about even to the church when the responsibility of continuing the prayer abandoned midstream by Jero falls on him:

> Yes Father, make you forgive us all. Make you save us from palaver. Save us from trouble at home. Tell our wives not to give us trouble …. Tell our wives not to give us trouble. And give us money to have a happy home. Give us money to satisfy our daily necessities. Make you no forget those of us who de struggle daily. Those who be Clerk today, make them Chief clerk tomorrow. Those who are messengers today, make them Senior service tomorrow. Those who have bicycles today, they will ride their own car tomorrow. I say those who de push bicycle, give them big car tomorrow. p.24

Chume and Fractured Gender-Role Schemas in *The Trial of Brother Jero*

When gender-role is fractured it is said to be distorted. So, one of the distorted gender-role schemas, according to Pleck (1995) is that "a man is superior to a woman, so a man's self-esteem is debased when his manhood is invalidated." Chume reminds Amope "you are talking to a man", after he has been granted permission to beat his wife. Amope makes a huge joke of his manliness when she says "A fine man you are, when you can't remember, a simple thing like a bottle of clean water" p.33. She is surprised at Chume's authoritative, liberated and assertive personality believing that only alcohol could have caused his de-emasculated status. He says "Pack up your things; you heard what I said" p.33. Her attempt to re-invent the psychological tools of debasing comments and verbal abuse to put him down as usual fails: "You may say what suits you. You know. I never touch any liquor." Amope taunts him the more "You needn't say it as if it was a virtue. You don't drink only because you cannot afford to. That is all the reason there is." p.33

She reminds him about his wretchedness to further destroy what is left of his manhood reminding him spitefully once again that his poverty is as a result of his low occupational prestige. "A messenger's pay isn't that much, you know – just in case you have forgotten, you're not drawing a minister's pay." p.33. One of the sex roles that differentiate men from women is being a provider. The provider role defines a man's masculinity in many African socio-cultural settings. Anyone who is unable to meet this specification is not only seen as unmanly but irresponsible. Amope queries why a responsible man will allow his wife stay out in the open:

> Just think, only this morning while I sat here, a Sanitary Inspector came along. He looked me all over and he made some notes in his book. Then he said, I suppose, women, you realize that this place is

> marked down for slum clearance. This to me, as if I live here. But you sit down and let your wife be exposed to such insults. And the sanitary inspector had a motor-cycle too, which is one better than a bicycle. p.34

She continues:

> A Sanitary Inspector is a better job anyway. You can make something of yourself one way or another. They all do. A little here, and a little there, call it bribery if you like, but see where you've got even though you don't drink or smoke or take bribes. He's got a motor-bike … anyway, who would want to offer kola to a Chief Messenger? p.34

Her humiliating words compare strongly with the surgeon's surgical blade with which the castration of the man is painfully done, leaving in its wake, erectile dysfunction, impotence, shame, low self-esteem, unassertiveness, and a possible activation of violence as psychotherapy. "Shut up your big mouth!" Chume barks at Amope with a determination to reassert his masculinity and to the consternation of Amope who asks "To me"? Although Chume may be criticized for insufficient problem-solving skill, in this circumstance what comes handy is battering, more so that Jero has sanctioned it. He says:

> Shut your big mouth before I shut it for you (*ties the mat round the cross bar*) And you'd better start to watch your step from now on. My period of abstinence is over. My cross has been lifted off my shoulders by the prophet. p.35

Genuinely distressed, Amope concludes that he is mad while Chume *(viciously tying up the mat*) replies "My period of trial is over (*practically strangling the mat*) If you so much as open your mouth now…(*gives a further twist to the string*). Chume would have dealt Amope a deadly blow but that he has been instructed by Jero to do that in his own house. He demonstrates what awaits her at home when he warns "(*setting her down*) if you shout just once more, I'll …. (*He raises a huge fist*)." p.35. All these are efforts to reclaim lost self-worth and diminished self-esteem as direct effects of fractured masculinity.

Findings, Conclusion and Recommendation

Findings confirm that when a man is rendered socially impotent his manhood is redefined and social construction fractured. Like Chume, he feels devalued by the lack of those things that categories him as a real man therefore becoming vulnerable in the social setting he has been constructed to be strong, macho and independent. It was also discovered that his dilemma is taken for granted because everyone believes that as a man, he must be a bread winner, emotionless and a responsible husband as well as a caring father. The same society that constructs him also gives the impression that all men operate on this same masculinity hierarchy forgetting that this construction can be fractured by constant shift in masculinity values. His case is further complicated by the presence of men who operate at the peak of the masculinity hierarchy called hegemonic. These men are super rich. If not super rich, they are normative, socially and emotionally stable with capacity to overcome social, economic and psychological challenges thrown at them in the process of enacting their masculinity. These are the character portraits of men Amope compares Chume with that activates aggression in him to salvage his self image.

In conclusion, the study focuses so much on social and psychological dynamics of the identified characters, especially Chume, Amope and Jero for the portrayal of diminishing self-esteem and loss of social virility. Many tools are employed by the characters concerned to demean Chume in the play. These tools include manipulation in its different dimensions, poverty, gullibility, insatiable

want and religious indoctrination, among others. Contrary to the masculine social construction of the male character, his masculinity can be fractured as represented in Chume's trauma when he breaks down emotionally, socially crippled and therefore becomes predisposed to violence. The public opprobrium arising from exceedingly shameful treatment he gets in front of Jero's house, drives him to the extreme. His masculinity defence mechanism breaks down when he resorts to violence and this is in perfect agreement with O' Neil and Nadeau who believe that in human psychology, the man who is a victim of fractured masculinity feels powerless and becomes desperate to regain his power and masculine self-image. It is, therefore a test of psychological stamina when the man's self-image is demeaned as a result of incapacitation in the demand by social construction on him to meet up with what makes him a real man.

The study establishes that men, as represented by Chume can be hurt, feel insecure, emotional and vulnerable when faced with the realities of life. Fractured masculinity also points to an indisputable fact that sexuality is no more understood through the prism of biology or sex orientation alone but a corollary of socio-cultural construction that constantly changes in relation to change in economic and social contexts. It was suggested that since changes and shifts in societal values that define masculinity are inevitable, there should be social advocacy both in schools, religious centers and National television for the erasure of toxic and traditional masculinity orientation. Social realities, change in global economic opportunities and value orientation are suggestions to the possibility of a constant fracturing of masculinities.

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MARXIST CRAFTSMANSHIP IN NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF OLU OBAFEMI'S *SUICIDE SYNDROME* AND OLA ROTIMI'S *IF...*

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Abstract

This paper examines the deployment of Marxist aesthetics and ideology in Nigerian drama through a critical study of Olu Obafemi's Suicide Syndrome and Ola Rotimi's IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled. It examines how both playwrights employ Marxist aesthetics to expose class contradictions, systemic oppression, and the failures of postcolonial leadership. Obafemi's Suicide Syndrome presents a trenchant commentary on intellectual disillusionment and the socio-political betrayal of the masses, while IF...dramatizes the complicity of traditional institutions in perpetuating neo-colonial oppression. The study reveals that both plays, though stylistically distinct, embody a deliberate Marxist aesthetics that foregrounds the agency of the oppressed and call for socio-political transformation. Ultimately, the paper underscores the role of drama as a tool for ideological resistance and a medium for articulating revolutionary consciousness within Nigerian society. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to knowledge on how Nigerian dramatists adapt and localize Marxist aesthetics to reflect indigenous socio-political realities. The study recommends that Nigerian playwrights and artists should continue to create socially committed works that expose contradictions within society and amplify the voices of the marginalized. .

Keywords: Nigerian Drama, Marxist Aesthetics, Revolutionary Consciousness, Oppression, Injustice, suicide.

Introduction

Marxism according to Gbilekaa, "is a philosophy of praxis which aims at the radical transformation of human reality based on a dialectical interpretation of history," (40). The aim is to destroy capitalism in order to establish a society in which humanity can give free rein to its essential powers, frustrated, denied, postponed and emasculated for long" (Eaglton 3). Marxist ideology has provided fertile ground for critical engagement in postcolonial African literature, especially drama. Nigerian dramatists have over the decades, engaged with Marxist themes as both an aesthetic strategy and a tool of political engagement, interrogating the power dynamics, class struggles, and socio-political dysfunctions that characterize postcolonial Nigerian society. Among these dramatists, Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi, stand out for their nuanced and ideologically charged portrayals of systemic exploitation, leadership betrayal, and the possibilities of revolutionary consciousness. Although Marxist theory originated in 19th-century Europe, its relevance in African literary expression lies in its capacity to unveil the exploitative structures perpetuated by local elites and foreign capitalists. The Marxists stand steadfastly with the oppressed people--the proletariat. Some of the notable Marxist writers in Nigeria include: Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Kole Omotoso, Tunde Fatunde, Olu Obafemi, Festus Iyayi, Ola Rotimi and Emeka Nwabueze among others. We are concerned in this work however, with Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled*. Both plays critique the bourgeois class that rose to power after independence, exposing the ways in which it continues to exploit the masses.

Commenting on the current economic and socio-political situation in Nigeria, Akinwande et al, observe that "the political challenges before the working and poor people, have become more sensitive than ever before (82). They further lament that the capitalist political class has severely

plundered the substantial potentials of the nation, while the poor continue to live in abject poverty. Similarly, Ribadu, laments the fact that Nigeria, the world's eighth largest exporter of crude oil, still has more than 70 percent of its population living below the poverty line, as a result of corruption and economic mismanagement. He asserts with disappointment that:

> The unpardonable failure of the political leadership class, managing the affairs and wealth of the country had inevitably brought severe misery to many voiceless and helpless Nigerians. Nigeria post-independence political bureaucratic and military elites had terribly pillaged the nation's common wealth and national patrimony with impunity, thereby denying Nigerians access to economic prosperity and quality living condition. The development assistance fund of about $400 billion that flowed into the country for socio-economic development between independence and the collapse of military dictatorship in 1999 was atrociously squandered by the political leaders of the period (Ribadu 4)

This paper examines how these plays exemplify Marxist craftsmanship, blending local aesthetics with global ideological concerns to challenge hegemonic structures and advocate for change. More specifically, the study will examine how Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF...* have critiqued the bourgeois class that replaced the colonial masters after independence.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that foregrounds this work is the Marxist theory propounded by Karl Marx (and Friedrich Engels (1976). The theory is used to explain a popular philosophical movement of the nineteenth century. Marxism is a materialistic doctrine resting on an economic base. As a doctrine, Marxism divides the society into two: the bourgeoisie (the capital holding class), and the proletariat (the wage earners). The doctrine argues that the power relationships between the capitalists and the working class are inherently exploitative and would inevitably create class conflict which will ultimately lead to a revolution in which the working class would overthrow the capitalist class and seize control of the economy (Ogayi & Etuk 56). Marxist literary theory examines the relationship between literature and the socio-economic conditions that produce it. Central to this approach is the idea that literature reflects and can potentially reshape the material realities of the society. In the African context, Marxist criticism is often interwoven with postcolonial discourse, focusing on the operation of power, class, and ideology in most postcolonial African states.

The application of Marxist theory to African drama underscores the role of literature in raising class consciousness and inspiring resistance. Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasises that, writers must be revolutionary and align themselves with the struggles of the oppressed using art to articulate their aspirations. Marxism, developed by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, posits that history is driven by material conditions and class struggles. Literature, from a Marxist perspective, is a reflection of social realities and an instrument for ideological resistance. The Marxist critic seeks to uncover how texts represent class relations, ideological state apparatuses and the mechanisms through which the ruling class maintains dominance.

In the context of African drama, Marxist criticism examines how playwrights depict the postcolonial bourgeoisie, who often replicate colonial structures of exploitation. African dramatists employ satire, allegory, and characterization to expose class conflicts and provoke political awareness. In *Suicide syndrome* and *IF...*,Obafemi and Rotimi utilize drama as a weapon of socio-political commentary, portraying leaders as predators who prey on their subjects thus sustaining systemic inequality.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the "craft" of Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi as Marxist dramatist ,.
2. To show how form (songs, chorus, satire, episodic structure) embodies Marxist aesthetics,

3. To compare socialist-realist agitation (*Suicide Syndrome*) with tragic-demystifying critique (*IF…*),
4. To situate the plays within Nigeria's socio-historical context of the 1970s–80s: a period marked by military rule, corruption, labor unrest, and disillusionment.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design rooted in textual and contextual analysis. It proceeds from the conviction, central to Marxist aesthetics, that literature cannot be separated from the material conditions of its production and reception. The methodology combines three interrelated approaches. These include: the comparative textual analysis of *Suicide Syndrome* and *If…*, the contextual analysis and critical synthesis. The plays under study are treated as literary texts whose dramaturgical devices encode ideological positions. The contextual analysis situate the plays within Nigeria's socio-political climate of the 1970s and 1980s, an era marked by military rule, corruption and oil-based capitalism. Information for this work are also drawn from books and journals articles .

Findings

The study reveals that Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF…* exemplify the dramatist as a Marxist craftsman who consciously shapes form into ideological critique. Both plays foreground class antagonisms, yet through different modalities: Obafemi deploys socialist-realist and agit-prop strategies chorus, typification, and satirical slogans to mobilize the oppressed toward immediate collective action, while Rotimi adopts a tragic-demystifying mode that exposes how the ruled internalize passivity through the recurring "if" refrain. A shared reliance on indigenous performance traditions such as song, communal chorus, and episodic structure demonstrates how Nigerian dramatists indigenize Brechtian estrangement techniques to unmask ideology and stimulate critical awareness. However, each method has limitations: Obafemi's directness risks schematic characters, while Rotimi's tragic tone risks fatalistic pessimism. Together, the plays affirm Nigerian theatre as a revolutionary space where dramatic craft is both cultural labor and political intervention.

Analysis and Discussion

Marxism, Class Struggle and the Nigerian Dramatists

Marxism, as a critical theory, provides a lens for understanding societal structures through the dynamics of class conflict, economic determinism, and ideological control. In postcolonial societies like Nigeria, where historical exploitation and continued economic disparity persist, Marxist analysis becomes particularly relevant. Nigerian dramatists have used theatre not only as a means of artistic expression but also as a potent tool for critiquing capitalist exploitation, neocolonialism, and the betrayal of the working class by political elites.

Nigeria's post-independence era has been characterized by political instability, military dictatorship, ethnic conflict, and economic inequality. These challenges have provided fertile ground for politically engaged drama. Nigerian playwrights have responded by producing works that reflect the frustrations of the masses and critique the bourgeois class that has replaced colonial rulers with indigenous oppressors. A study of most published Nigerian plays reveals their thematic contexts as those which bear a heavy burden of reflecting the dichotomy between the "haves" and the "have nots" (Afolayan & Adeseke 11). As a result of this, the palpable gulf between the rich and the poor, upper and lower classes, is noticeable in plays like Osofisan's *Once upon Four Robbers* and *Morountodun,* and Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, *Hopes of The Living Dead* and *If… A Tragedy of the Ruled* (Afolayan &Adeleke 11).

Femi Osofisan stands out as Nigeria's most overtly Marxist dramatist. His plays thematise the problems of the peasants and the working class. Viewing drama as a medium of instruction, he uses it to raise the consciousness of the masses towards the prevailing social decadence and thus move them into taking appropriate action. His plays therefore in the words of Gbilekaa, "consistently attack all forms of corruption, oppression, injustice and tyranny" (74). Osofisan thus, uses drama as a tool of social engagement and ideological confrontation. In plays like Morountodun and Once Upon Four Robbers, for instance, Osofisan adapts traditional narratives and folk forms to challenge capitalist oppression and thus promoting revolutionary consciousness. In Rotimi"s Hopes of the Living Dead the downtrodden lepers who constitute the "have nots" give credibility to the author's commitment to social alienation as his lepers are simply regarded as socio-economic waste and aliens to their environment. Rotimi's Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again and The Gods Are Not to Blame, explore the failure of leadership and the manipulation of power. Osofisan, cited in Afolayan and Adeseke, also maintains that:

> Plays like Rotimi's *If* and *Hopes of the Living Dead,* Sowande's *Cirus of Freedom Road,* Obafemi's *Nights of the Mystical Beast*, Segun Oyekunle's *Katakata for Sufferhead*, Okediji's *Rere Run,* Soyinka's *Jero's Metamorphosis, Opera Wonyosi* or *The Bacchae of Euripides* and virtually all of my own works especially such pieces as *Once Upon Four Robbers, Another Raft, Aringindin...* are intended to be as much investigative rites of socio-political rebellion as they are deliberate revisions of the inherited theatrical forms on behalf of that hidden agenda (Afolayan and Adeseke,11).

However, our major concern in this paper is to examine the deployment of Marxist craftsmanship in Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome* and Ola Rotimi's *IF... the tragedy of the Ruled.*

Olu Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*

Olu Obafemi, is a respected Nigerian scholar, dramatist, poet, critic, and Professor of English. He is known for his contributions to literature and drama, particularly with themes related to social justice and African identity. Olu has published sixteen texts across the genres of drama, poetry and prose. *Suicide Syndrome*, is his third and the subject matter of the play is the exposure of the grave implications of the gross inequality in the playwright's society (Babatunde 1). The play, according to Babatunde, was published in 1988, during the regime of the military administration of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida (1985-1993) particularly at the time of the austerity introduced by the administration in consistence with International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) recommendations. This period was notorious for corruption, inequity and economic marginalization of the masses. Though the play was first published more than three decades ago, the subject matter and themes are still relevant to the contemporary socio-political realities in the country.

Olu Obafemi's *Suicide syndrome*, is a compelling political drama that interrogates the moral decay and ideological disillusionment of post-independence Nigeria. As a playwright deeply rooted in Marxist aesthetics and revolutionary ideals, Obafemi presents a society where the intellectual elite have capitulated to corrupt power structures, and the dream of liberation has given way to despair. The play revolves around Professor Toriola, a disillusioned academic who once held revolutionary ideals but has become estranged from society and from himself. Haunted by the collapse of ethical values, systemic corruption, and the betrayal of post-colonial aspirations, Toriola grapples with suicidal thoughts. His personal crisis becomes symbolic of the broader societal malaise, thus serving as a critique of intellectual impotence and the moral failure of leadership in a post-colonial African nation.

Suicide Syndrome, is a psychological and political drama that foregrounds the existential dilemmas of post-colonial African elites against the backdrop of systemic economic decay and political corruption. In line with Marxist ideology, the play critiques the bourgeois class and explores how material alienation and capitalist exploitation lead to societal disintegration and personal despair. In the author's note to the text, Obafemi states:

> I do not conceive *Suicide Syndrome* as a play about suicide at all. If anything, it is a rabid exposure of the symptoms of suicide, the cause; that is, neo-colonial and socio-economic order in Nigeria and other third world nations. It is a proposition of the options available to the working people, the peasantry, the unemployed but unemployable majority in these neo-colonies.

This obviously reveals that Obafemi has set out to unveil the state of deprivation and absurdities that afflict the "have-nots" in the Nigerian society where there is economic imbalance. Interestingly, the play begins as a protest against the Eurocentric symphonized theatrical form which beclouds the African realities of hazards and impoverishments.

Professor Toriola, embodies the tragic fate of the post-independence intellectual who finds himself trapped within a corrupt capitalist system he initially hoped to reform. Through Toriola's internal crisis and ultimate suicidal ideation, Obafemi exposes the alienation that Karl Marx described the separation of individuals from the products of their labour, from their humanity, and from the social systems they help perpetuate but cannot control. Despite his education and idealism, Toriola could not effect meaningful change because the structures of exploitation are deeply entrenched. He becomes a metaphor for the failure of the so-called "revolutionary" elites who have been absorbed into the oppressive apparatus they once opposed.

With the creative use of setting to establish the Marxist radical aesthetics of the play, Obafemi creates two different forms of environments in *Suicide Syndrome*. These are, the crude environment populated by the proletariat and the refined area with the bourgeoisie class. Mama and her two children are the representatives of the proletariat in the slum area. Although Mama's husband, the breadwinner of the family is working, the family can hardly feed itself. Mama's husband works diligently but unfortunately what he earns for his hard work cannot sustain his family. They live on credit. Mama, like some members of the proletariat class, hopes that all will be well with time. The playwright introduces the radical aesthetics with the outburst of Mama's son who is no longer comfortable with the socio-economic stratification in their society. The following excerpt reveals thus:

> SON: I mean, Mama. You, papa, my sister and me. We are hungry and poor. And papa. He works harder than a jackal. So hard I am always afraid to look at him returning from the factory, bent-double at the back. Yet, every time they drive us home from school for not paying our school fees, not buying our books. Our uniforms are tattered and thread-bare. Me and my sister, we each have a cup of gari once a day. (Taking mama's hands, who is trying hard not to crack). Tell me mama: who is that devil that keeps us in this condition? (115)

Mama's response to her son's question is that her children are different from the bourgeoisie's children. Her response is a reflection of the passivity and resignation to the fate of proletariats in the contemporary socio-economic arrangements. Mama's characterisation in the play validates Karl Marx's idea that "religion is the opium of the masses". She is carried away by the opium of the religion by sermonising her children to accept their problems and suffering as divine. (Azeez and Tolulope 81). In Marxist ideology, religion is the superstructure that the bourgeoisie often adopts to indoctrinate the proletariat class into the lives of suffering and wants. To Mama, asking questions about their penurious situations is a blasphemy. She reminds her children that they are children of God and for this reason, they should always be grateful to Him in all situations. She admonishes her children thus:

MAMA: (*Now playing a philosophic game*). My children. It is evil to think like that. Evil. It is not good for children of God. It will make you hate humanity. (*Suicide Syndrome,* p.116)

Ola Rotimi's *IF...*

IF... is a radically committed play. Having being inspired by the wastages and recklessness of the second Republic, Rotimi has turned his attention from historical plays to socially committed drama to unveil the suffering of the ordinary people, their aspirations, their frustrations, their feelings and the neglect and deprivation that they suffer. Rotimi tries to re-awaken the consciousness of the masses, getting them set for the task ahead. Hence, in the words of Mabel Evwierhoma "the call for a radical re-orientation is heeded by the tenants in the building in IF...and the inmates of the leprosy ward in Hopes of the Living Dead (2)

IF... has several sub plots and themes. The asthmatic bouts of Onyema, Mama's fortieth marriage arrangement and sickness are all subplots and themes that are embedded in this drama that emphasizes the importance of unity in diversity. Closely related to the theme of solidarity is that of exploitation, positive leadership and self reliance. The theme of solidarity is built through the tenants, the poor masses described as the Chosified ǁbeings. The tenants are a microcosm of the nation, each coming from a tribal nucleus that has formed the federation of Nigeria. Akpan, Chinwe and Dokubo are from the East, Mallam Garuba Kazaure and Dr. Hamidu alias Che Guevara are from the North while Banji and Betty are from the West and Mid-West respectively. Inspite of their linguistic, cultural and religious differences, they have all come together as a team to fight a common enemy, their callous landlord. The Marxist Hamidu articulates this theme of solidarity in the following words:

> ...Solidarity. The day our solidarity dissolves is the day our humanity ends and our worthlessness begins....Nobody should be deemed useless in a struggle against oppression.
> Not even our already chosified brother here– Garuba. The same goes for Betty. And you... Chinwe, and me, and all of us. Nobody is useless (*If...*16-17).

IF... also highlights the power of the masses in rectifying a corrupt judiciary or the law courts through electoral politics. Papa articulates this view with emphatic clarity.

> A forthright judiciary is a reflection of the confidence it derives from the ethics of the people. The people then are the last hope for save guarding that ethics through the kinds of persons they put in power. That is the language you must speak tomorrow. With your votes. You know the candidates... anything short of this language, any vote cast for a politician tomorrow on the basis of sheer fatherhood by birth: or of brotherhood by clan; or sisterhood by religion is your doom. Our last hope then, is in a sound government that will inspire a forthright judiciary before which we'll present our case. That's all. (*If...* 14-15).

Language Aesthetics in Obafemi's *Suicide Syndrome*

Obafemi's language in *Suicide Syndrome* is sharp, charged with political rhetorics and symbolism that aim to raise consciousness rather than merely entertain. The structure of the play moving between introspection, debate, and confrontation mirrors the dialectical method of Marxist theory, where contradictions are laid bare to drive social change. With the understanding that dramatic creativity goes beyond what is said, this paper adopts Marxist language ideology in the interpretation of *Suicide Syndrome*. This is because the plot and artistic verisimilitude of the play reveal its focus on Marxist ideals of radical poetics. This argument is based on the fact that the aesthetics of what is said can only be realized on the pages of the text and on-stage during performance through how the playwright has used language to attain the aesthetic and ideological visions of the play. Overtly or covertly, Marxist ideologues such as Gareth Stedman Jones in *Languages of the Class* (1983), Perry Anderson in *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983), Bryan Palmer in *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (1990), Peter Ives in *The Grammar of Hegemony* (1997), *Language and Hegemony in*

Gramsci (2004) and *Gramsci's Politics of Language: Engaging the Bakhtin Circle and the Frankfurt School* (2004), Umberto Eco in *The Search for the Perfect Language* (1995) and Pierre Bourdieu in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) have critiqued the use of language to establish/deconstruct social class and hegemony. The aggregate of their views is that language is generative and advances as human consciousness of their socio-economic status grow and develop with civilization and revolution.

Olu Obafemi, one of Nigeria's famous playwrights and a contemporary of Femi Osofisan, subscribes to the above view about the power of language to delineate class differences with the presentation of his radical poetics in *Suicide Syndrome*. Though he uses English language to express his thought in the play, he reveals his bilingual competence in the use of English and Yoruba languages with his lexical choices and syntactic structures. For instance, the New Director uses English and Yoruba languages to illustrate the level of hardship that most people face in Nigeria when he says:

> people turning to *kainkain* (local gin) or to cocaine,
> people restituting themselves
> people robbing,
> people killing,
> people deceiving others.(*Suicide* 112)

People rob, kill and deceive others in order to survive in a capitalist society where the worth of man is determined only by his monetary acquisition. This is further substantiated in the following authorial lines:

Ba-bu kudi Not to have money
Ba-bu duniyan is not to have audience
(In Yoruba)
Ti ko ba sowo
Ko ni seniyan
Me jalai looo (*Suicide* 112)

Supporting the above claim, Akwanya, Amechi, states that "the language use in the text was seen as embodying the unconscious signature of the author" (145). The author's unconscious signature, as found in the text, is credited to his consciousness of the inherent and explicit social malaise in the Nigerian society.

With the understanding that dramatic creativity goes beyond what is said, this paper adopts Marxist langua *Suicide* ge ideology in the interpretation of *Suicide Syndrome*. This is because the plot and artistic verisimilitude of the play reveal its focus on Marxist ideals of radical poetics. This argument is based on the fact that the aesthetics of what is said can only be realized on the pages of the text and on the stage during performance through how the playwright has used language to attain the aesthetic and ideological visions of the play. Language is said to be generative and advances as human consciousness of their socio-economic status grow and develop with civilization and revolution. Besides, the playwright breaks the monotony associated with the use of English language in dramatic text with the use of pidgin and Yoruba indigenous language. As seen in expressions such as "Olorun"(*Suicide* 109), "Eh" "Ko ni seniyan", "I mean, Mama. You, papa, my sister and me. We are hungry and poor" *(Suicide* 112). This creative use of language is used in characterization and delimitation of each character's roles which assists readers and critics to evaluate the social, educational and economic status of the play's characters. The use of language of each of the characters in the play reveals the overall ideology of the playwright as a person with concerns for the plight of the masses and for egalitarian society devoid of social and economic stratification in any guise

Language Aesthetics in Rotimi's *IF...*

In Rotimi's *IF...*, language functions both as a tool of domination and resistance. The ruling elite speaks in detached, bureaucratic tones, while the subalterns use oral traditions, humor, and

metaphor to challenge authority. This linguistic dualism mirrors the ideological conflict at the heart of the play, reinforcing the Marxist premise that culture is a battleground for class struggle. The background events that provide the story is the return to civil rule in 1979. It is the eve of the voting day when all Nigerians will go to the polls to elect a civilian government. However, for the inmates of a multi-tenanted building where different tribes and classes live, it is a different story. They are threatened with quit notices from their landlord who wants to intimidate and blackmail them into voting for him in his bid to win a senatorial seat.

From the play, we find that the intellectuals comprising the lawyer, doctors and teachers who live in the multi-tenanted building were ready to educate their co-tenants on the need to remain united in solidarity so as to be able to fight their common enemy their landlord and other oppressors. They reminded the tenants the fact that once their solidarity is broken, the landlord will find it easier to deal with them on their individual capacities and defeat them. There is therefore, the need for them to work together to achieve their collective interest by voting for the candidate whom they feel will work to improve their lives (16). Thus, almost to a man, including those who are not served with the quit notices, the tenants forget their differences and come together in solidarity under the able leadership of Papa to oppose the oppressive predilection and high-handedness of their landlord. According to the retired teacher:

> …we must let the landlord know that we all here are one. If because we refuse to take oaths to vote for him in the coming elections, this now is his way of punishing us, fair enough. But let him punish all of us. No exceptions. I see divide and rule tactics at work here, and we must resist them at all costs. (*If*...13).

The tenants resolve to bide for time to enable them to take the matter to court for adjudication. Meanwhile, they unanimously mandate Papa to write a strong letter to the landlord protesting against the quit notices as well as the hike in rents. All the tenants are equally advised not to pay above the usual twenty naira. Rotimi believes that to reassert their humanity the oppressed masses must be in solidarity to rescue themselves from the forces of exploitation that have long gripped them in the strangle-hold of an inguinal hernia (*If*...16). But this is dependent on several conditions predicated on the big IF. That is:

If the masses, the oppressed masses again for a change will use their votes as tools for their own freedom. If that fails, then mass-struggle becomes imperative (*If*...16).

Unfortunately, at the end of the play, the poor masses are unable to bring the desired change through the ballot box. The desire to destroy the notorious oppressive capitalist system through electoral politics has been frustrated by the very capitalists who have the muscle and the wherewithal to twist things in their favour.

In *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled*, Rotimi depicts a society teetering on the brink of revolution, where the promises of independence have been squandered by the ruling elite. The play captures the contradictions of a bourgeois class that rose from anti-colonial struggle only to replicate colonial structures of domination. The tragedy lies not only in the rulers' betrayal but also in the failure of the ruled to act collectively until the brink of collapse.

Revolutionary Praxis and the Role of the Dramatist

Drama is a veritable means of social reconstruction. Both Obafemi and Rotimi position themselves as dramatist-activists who seek to provoke social change through their art. Their plays do not merely depict social decay, they dramatize the necessity of revolutionary praxis. In the Brechtian tradition, the audience is not meant to passively consume but to actively engage, question, and transform. Obafemi's *Suicide syndrome*, is a revolutionary text that dramatizes the failure of reformist politics and gestures towards radical social transformation. Through the protagonist, Professor Toriola, Obafemi enacts a Marxist critique of post-colonial power structures while offering the possibilities of revolutionary praxis a term Paulo Freire describes as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it (Pedagogy of the oppressed). In this sense, *Suicide Syndrome* moves beyond despair to advocate for dialectical engagement with the world.

Suicide Syndrome represents the post-colonial intellectuals, who having once haboured revolutionary ideals, succumbs to the corrupting influences of the bourgeois political class. His despair and eventual suicidal ideation reflect notion of alienation: he becomes estranged from his purpose, his community and himself *Suicide Syndrome* . Though the play ends on a note of despair, Obafemi's intention is not to glorify defeat but to illustrate the urgent need for collective revolutionary engagement. The moral collapse of the elite underscores the necessity of reimagining leadership from below. Toriola's suicide thus becomes a symbolic call to arms—a rejection of reformism and a turn towards radical change.

In *IF*..., the revolutionary pulse of the play, is built around the Marxist Hamidu. Hamidu, stirs the tenants to anger against their oppressive political and economic set up. The tenants are the poor masses described as the "Chosified beings." The tenants are a microcosm of the nation, each coming from a tribal nucleus that has formed the federation of Nigeria. Akpan, Chinwe and Dokubo are from the East, Mallam Garuba Kazaure and Dr. Hamidualias Che Guevara are from the North while Banji and Betty are from the West and Mid-West respectively. In spite of their linguistic, cultural and religious differences, they have all come together as a team to fight a common enemy, their callous landlord. The Marxist Hamidu articulates this theme of solidarity in the following words:

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In *Suicide Syndrome,* while the play's tone is tragic, there are undercurrents of revolutionary hope, a belief that through the exposure of the system's rot, a new consciousness might arise among the oppressed. In typical Marxist fashion, Obafemi suggests that despair itself can be revolutionary, if it leads to collective awakening and action.

Conclusion

Suicide Syndrome and *IF... A Tragedy of the Ruled* are exemplary works of Marxist craftsmanship in Nigerian drama. Through their incisive critique of class inequality, ideological manipulation, and postcolonial disillusionment, both plays contribute to a tradition of revolutionary theatre. Olu Obafemi and Ola Rotimi use the stage not just to reflect reality, but to confront it, challenge it, and ultimately, inspire its transformation. Their works reaffirm the role of drama as a vehicle for ideological resistance and social liberation in contemporary African societies.

In *Suicide Syndrome,* Obafemi dramatizes revolutionary praxis by exposing the failures of the post-colonial elites, critiquing ideological systems, and calling for the birth of a new political consciousness. In doing so, Obafemi invites his audience not to mourn, but to organize, not to retreat into despair, but to rise with purpose. Toriola's ultimate breakdown is not meant to paralyse the audience; rather, it urges them to recognise complicity, question norms, and seek alternatives.

Similarly, Rotimi exposes how ideology is weaponized to maintain the status quo. Religious and cultural narratives are manipulated to discourage resistance and justify inequality. The people are alienated not only from political power but also from the ability to see through the veil of false consciousness. However, Rotimi's dramaturgy also suggests the potential for awakening, as

disillusionment fuels critical reflection and rebellion. Both plays thus align with Marxist dramaturgy's commitment to praxis art as a catalyst for political awakening.

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AGAPE LOVE IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13:1-13: PSYCHOLOGICAL CORRELATES OF WELL-BEING AMONG NIGERIAN PEOPLE

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Abstract
This paper investigates the psychological correlates of Agape love, as conceptualized in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, with well-being among Nigerians. This study is informed by glaring and increasing theoretical understanding of love without contextualising it in people's mind. Drawing upon an interdisciplinary approach, this study synthesises exegetical analysis of the biblical text with psychological theories of well-being and an examination of the socio-cultural context of Nigeria. The research explores how the characteristics of Agape love such as patience, kindness, selflessness, and enduring hope, can foster positive psychological states, enhance social connectedness and contribute to overall well-being. By analyzing existing academic literature, this paper aims to bridge the gap in understanding the empirical investigation of Agape love as a psychological correlate of well-being within the Nigerian population. The study concludes that the cultivation of Agape love can serve as a significant resource for promoting mental health, resilience, and flourishing in a society grappling with various socio-economic and cultural challenges. Recommendations for further research and practical applications within religious institutions, counselling, and community development initiatives in Nigeria are also provided.

Keywords: Agape love, 1 Corinthians 13, psychological well-being, Nigeria, Christian ethics, positive psychology.

1. Introduction

The pursuit of well-being is a universal human endeavour, encompassing physical, mental, and social dimensions of a fulfilling life. In recent years, the field of psychology has witnessed a paradigm shift, moving beyond a primary focus on pathology to an increased interest in the factors that contribute to human flourishing (Hernandez *et al.,* 2017:18). This has led to a growing body of research on positive psychology, which explores concepts such as happiness, life satisfaction, and the role of character strengths in promoting well-being. In the Nigerian context, where individuals navigate a complex interplay of cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and socio-economic challenges, understanding the pathways to well-being is of paramount importance. The nation faces significant mental health challenges, with a substantial gap between the demand for mental health services and the available resources (Fadele *et al.,* 2024: 1). This underscores the need to explore culturally relevant and accessible resources that can foster psychological resilience and well-being.

One such resource, deeply embedded in the religious fabric of Nigerian society, is the concept of Agape love, as articulated in the Christian scriptures. While the theological significance of Agape love has been extensively explored, its psychological implications, particularly as a correlate

of psychological well-being, remain a relatively under-researched area, especially within the Nigerian context. This study aims to bridge the gap by examining how Agape love influences psychological well-being among Nigerian people.

Conceptual Clarification

For the sake of context and better understanding, it is important to clarify the key concepts that make the research topic. Hence, the following concepts are defined.

Agape Love Agape is a Greek word *ἀγάπη* that can be referred to as unconditional love. It embraces selflessness and concern for the welfare of others always portrayed by sacrifices, kindness and generousity. The word originates from Ancient Greek where it was used to explain love in its perfect and selfless fashion. Agape is the love of God for man (Lewis 1960). It is often considered the highest form of human connection and is rooted in principles of compassion, empathy, and genuine care (Resilience Lab, 2024). In a biblical context, agape love is described as a love that is not based on emotions or feelings but on the will and choice to prioritise another's highest good, even when it is not reciprocated. This type of love is characterized by unselfishness, giving, and even sacrifice, and it is often associated with the divine love of God. The term "Agape," particularly as described in 1 Corinthians 13:1-13, refers to a selfless, unconditional, and sacrificial love that is believed to be a divine gift. This form of love is distinct from other forms of love, such as familial love (*storge*), friendship (*philia*), or romantic love (*eros*). It is characterized by patience, kindness, humility, and a commitment to the well-being of others, even in the absence of personal gain.

Psychological Well-Being: The term psychological well-being is defined as the subjective experience of positively valenced feelings or cognitive appraisals including lower activation effects such as calm or satisfied, as well as higher activation effects such as excited or thrilled (Hernandez, 2018, p. 19).

Exegetical Analysis of 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians addresses a myriad of issues within the nascent Christian community in Corinth, a bustling Roman colony known for its commercial prosperity and diverse cultural influences. The Corinthian church, though gifted with spiritual manifestations, was plagued by divisions, ethical lapses, and a misunderstanding of spiritual gifts. In this context, 1 Corinthians 13 emerges as a pivotal chapter, often referred to as the "love chapter," strategically placed between discussions on spiritual gifts (chapters 12 and 14) to highlight the supreme importance of love as the guiding principle for their exercise (Nguyen, 2022:3).

Brief Historical and Cultural Context of Corinth and Paul's Letter

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city, a melting pot of various cultures, philosophies, and religions. Its strategic location made it a significant trade hub, leading to both economic prosperity and moral laxity. The city was home to the temple of Aphrodite, associated with prostitution, and various mystery cults. This environment likely influenced the Corinthian believers, who struggled to reconcile their new Christian identity with the prevailing cultural norms. Paul's letter, therefore, served as a pastoral response to specific reports and questions from the Corinthian church, aiming to correct their misconceptions and guide them towards a more mature understanding of Christian life and community (Nguyen, 2022: 4-5).

Textual Analysis of Key Terms ("agape," "love," "faith," "hope")

1 Corinthians 13 is a poetic and profound exposition on the nature of agape love. Paul contrasts agape with other spiritual gifts and human achievements, emphasizing its indispensable and enduring quality. The chapter can be broadly divided into three sections:

The Supremacy of Love (verses 1-3): Paul begins by asserting that even the most impressive spiritual gifts—speaking in tongues, prophecy, knowledge, and faith that can move mountains—are

meaningless without agape love. He extends this to acts of extreme self-sacrifice, such as giving away all possessions or even one's body to hardship, declaring them profitless without love. This highlights that the motive behind an action, rooted in agape, is more crucial than the action itself. Nguyen (2022: 7) notes that Paul uses a series of conditional sentences to underscore this point, emphasizing that spiritual gifts, while important, are empty without love at their core.

The Characteristics of Love (verses 4-7): This section provides a vivid description of agape love through a series of verbs and adjectives, often referred to as the "love is/love is not" passage. Agape is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, does not dishonor others, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, keeps no record of wrongs, does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes and always perseveres. These characteristics paint a picture of a love that is active, relational, and focused on the well-being of the other. This detailed portrayal offers a psychological blueprint for interpersonal behavior that fosters positive relationships and contributes to individual and communal well-being.

The Permanence of Love (verses 8-13): Paul contrasts the temporary nature of spiritual gifts (prophecy, tongues, knowledge) with the eternal nature of agape love. He uses the analogy of childhood versus maturity to illustrate that these gifts are partial and will cease when "perfection comes." The ultimate and enduring realities are faith, hope, and love, with love being the greatest of these. This emphasizes that while spiritual gifts serve a purpose in the present age, agape love transcends time and remains eternally significant. This enduring quality of love has profound psychological implications for resilience, meaning-making, and long-term well-being.

Well-being in Nigerian Society

Understanding well-being in Nigeria necessitates a deep appreciation of its unique socio-cultural landscape, economic realities, and the pervasive influence of religious beliefs. The concept of well-being, while universally sought, is often shaped by local contexts, and in Nigeria, these contexts present both opportunities and significant challenges.

Nigeria is a highly diverse nation, with its rich cultural tapestry which profoundly influences individual and collective perceptions of well-being. Traditional communal values, strong family ties, and a sense of collective identity often serve as significant sources of support and resilience. In many Nigerian cultures, well-being is not solely an individual pursuit but is deeply intertwined with the welfare of the family and community. Social harmony, respect for elders, and adherence to cultural norms often contribute to an individual's sense of belonging and psychological comfort.

However, psychological well-being in Nigeria is significantly influenced by a complex interplay of socioeconomic, cultural, and societal factors.

Socio-economic Factors: Poverty and unemployment are major determinants of mental health issues in Nigeria (Taiwo, 2024). Low socioeconomic status is strongly linked to poor self-reported mental health, including depression, anxiety, and sleep problems (Agberotimi *et al.*, 2020). The harsh economic realities, job loss, and financial insecurity contribute significantly to psychological distress among young Nigerians (Adekunle, 2024; Eneh & Eneh, 2024). The increasing cost of living further exacerbates mental health disorders (Ewhrudjakpor, 2009).

Cultural Factors and Stigma: Cultural beliefs and traditions play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of mental illness in Nigeria. Many Nigerians attribute mental disorders to supernatural beliefs, spiritual forces, curses, or witchcraft (Orngu *et al.*, 2015, Lasebikan, 2016; Labinjo, 2021). This often leads to individuals seeking help from traditional healers or spiritualists before formal mental health services (Lasebikan *et al.,* 2012).

Stigma and discrimination are pervasive, with mental illness often labeled, devalued, and associated with perceived dangerousness (Ogunwale *et al.*, 2023; Oluokun, 2024). This stigma significantly hinders help-seeking behaviour and contributes to the underutilisation of mental health services (Yale Medicine, 2012, Akinbobola, 2024). Even healthcare professionals may hold

stigmatizing attitudes toward psychiatric patients (PMC, 2018). The lack of advocacy for mental illness as a result of fear of stigmatization further compounds the problem (Urigwe, 2010).

Other Factors: Internet addiction has also been identified as a factor influencing the psychological well-being of students in Nigeria (Hussaini & Akachukwu, 2025). Additionally, homelessness factors contribute to psychological well-being concerns among urban residents (Ekhaese *et al.*, 2021). Limited access to quality education, healthcare, and basic infrastructure further exacerbates these challenges, particularly in rural areas. Political instability, insecurity, and corruption also contribute to a pervasive sense of uncertainty and stress, affecting the psychological state of the populace. The constant struggle for basic necessities can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and a diminished sense of control over one's life, all of which are detrimental to well-being.

Influence of Religious Beliefs on Well-being in Nigeria

Religion plays an exceptionally prominent role in Nigerian society, with Christianity and Islam being the dominant faiths, alongside various indigenous belief systems. For many Nigerians, religious belief is not merely a private affair but a central organizing principle of life, influencing moral values, social norms, and coping mechanisms. Religious communities often serve as vital social support networks, providing a sense of belonging, purpose, and hope, particularly in the face of adversity. In the context of well-being, religious beliefs can offer several benefits:

1. **Meaning and Purpose:** Religion often provides a comprehensive worldview that imbues life with meaning and purpose, offering answers to existential questions and a framework for understanding suffering. This sense of purpose is a key component of eudaimonic well-being.
2. **Social Support:** Religious congregations often function as strong social networks, providing emotional, practical, and spiritual support to their members. This social connectedness can buffer the effects of stress and loneliness, enhancing psychological well-being.
3. **Coping Mechanisms:** Faith and prayer are frequently employed as coping strategies during times of crisis and hardship. Belief in divine intervention or a benevolent higher power can foster optimism and resilience.
4. **Moral Guidance:** Religious teachings provide ethical frameworks that guide behaviour, promoting virtues such as compassion, forgiveness, and altruism, which are positively correlated with well-being.

Madubuike (2023:71) highlights the concept of *Ifunanya* (Agape Love) therapy within the Igbo worldview, emphasising its role in promoting physical and mental health, and social cohesion. This indigenous therapeutic approach underscores how unconditional love, deeply rooted in cultural and religious beliefs, is seen as essential for holistic well-being in Nigeria. Also, Sulaiman *et al.* (2023:10) found that spiritual well-being and intrinsic religiosity were associated with improved mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. This demonstrates the inherent connection between spiritual concepts and psychological health within the Nigerian context.

An Analysis of Agape Love as a Psychological Correlate of Well-Being

The characteristics of Agape love, as meticulously detailed in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, offer a profound psychological blueprint for fostering well-being. These attributes are not merely abstract virtues but actionable behaviours and attitudes that directly align with established psychological correlates of flourishing.

Nexus between the Characteristics of Agape Love and Psychological Well-being

Patience *μακροθυμεί* Psychologically, patience is closely linked to emotional regulation, resilience, and stress management. An individual who practices patience is better equipped to handle adversity, delay gratification, and maintain composure in challenging situations. This directly contributes to reduced negative affect and enhanced coping mechanisms, both crucial for well-being. In a society often characterised by economic hardship and social instability, patience can foster a sense of inner calm and perseverance, preventing burnout and promoting mental fortitude.

Kindness *χρηστεύεται*: Kindness involves benevolent and compassionate behavior towards others. From a psychological perspective, acts of kindness are known to activate the brain's reward system, leading to increased happiness and a sense of purpose. It strengthens social bonds, fosters empathy, and promotes prosocial behavior, all of which are fundamental to positive relationships and social connectedness, a key correlate of well-being (Hernandez *et al.*, 2017:25). The reciprocal nature of kindness also contributes to a positive feedback loop, enhancing both the giver's and receiver's well-being.

Not Envious *(οὐ ζηλοι)*: Envy, a negative emotion arising from comparison with others, is detrimental to well-being, leading to feelings of inadequacy, resentment, and unhappiness. The absence of envy, as one of the characteristics of Agape love, promotes contentment, gratitude, and an appreciation for others' successes. Psychologically, this fosters a healthier self-concept and reduces the cognitive distortions associated with social comparison, thereby enhancing positive affect and overall life satisfaction.

Not Boastful (*οὐ περπερεύεται*) and Not Proud (*οὐ φυσιοῦται*) Boasting and pride are often rooted in insecurity and a need for external validation. Agape love, being humble, frees individuals from this need, promoting genuine self-acceptance and a focus on intrinsic worth rather than external accolades. Psychologically, humility is associated with greater self-awareness, stronger interpersonal relationships, and reduced narcissistic tendencies, all of which contribute to a more stable and authentic sense of well-being.

Does Not Dishonour Others (*οὐκ ἀσχημονει*): This characteristic emphasises respect, dignity and appropriate social conduct. Psychologically, treating others with honor fosters trust, mutual respect, and positive social interactions. It reduces conflict and promotes a harmonious social environment, which is crucial for collective well-being. This is particularly relevant in diverse societies where intergroup relations can be strained.

Not Self-seeking (*οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς*): Self-seeking behaviour, driven by ego and personal gain, often leads to isolation and dissatisfaction. Agape love, being selfless, prioritizes the needs and well-being of others. This altruistic orientation is strongly linked to increased happiness, a sense of meaning, and reduced symptoms of depression. Engaging in prosocial behavior and contributing to something larger than oneself provides a profound sense of purpose, a core component of eudaimonic well-being.

Not Easily Angered (*οὐ παροξύνεται*): The ability to manage anger and avoid irritability is vital for emotional regulation and healthy relationships. Agape love's characteristic of not being easily angered promotes emotional stability, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution. Psychologically, this reduces chronic stress, improves interpersonal communication, and fosters a more peaceful internal and external environment.

Keeps No Record of Wrongs (*οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν*): This refers to forgiveness and the release of resentment. Holding onto grudges is psychologically damaging, leading to chronic stress, anxiety, and impaired relationships. Agape love, through its capacity for forgiveness, promotes emotional healing, reconciliation, and psychological liberation. This is a powerful mechanism for enhancing mental health and fostering resilience in the face of past hurts.

Does Not Delight in Evil but Rejoices with the Truth (*οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ, συγχαίρει δὲ τῇ ἀληθείᾳ*): This characteristic underscoresa commitment to justice, integrity, and authenticity. Psychologically, aligning one's values with truth and justice promotes cognitive consistency, moral integrity, and a strong sense of self. It fosters a positive moral identity and contributes to a sense of purpose and meaning, particularly when individuals are engaged in advocating for what is right.

Always Protects (*πάντα στέγει*), Always Trusts (*πάντα πιστεύει*), Always Hopes (*πάντα ἐλπίζει*), Always Perseveres (*πάντα ὑπομένει*): These enduring qualities of Agape love are directly linked to resilience, optimism, and a positive outlook. "Always protects" implies a commitment to safeguarding the well-being of others. "Always trusts" fosters secure attachments and reduces anxiety in relationships. "Always hopes" is a direct correlate of optimism, providing a future-oriented perspective that sustains individuals through difficulties. "Always perseveres" speaks to grit and determination, enabling individuals to overcome obstacles and achieve long-term goals.

These attributes collectively build psychological strength and contribute to a robust sense of well-being, even in the face of adversity.

The Enduring Nature of Agape Love (Faith, Hope) and Resilience

1 Corinthians 13:13 states, "And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love." The enduring nature of faith, hope, and love, with love being supreme, has profound implications for psychological resilience and a positive outlook. Faith, in this context, can be understood as a deep trust in divine providence and a belief in a benevolent order, which provides a stable foundation amidst life's uncertainties. Psychologically, this translates to a sense of security, reduced anxiety, and the ability to find meaning even in suffering. Hope, a future-oriented construct, is a powerful predictor of well-being and resilience. It enables individuals to envision a better future, set goals, and persevere in the face of obstacles. When individuals possess hope, they are more likely to engage in problem-solving, seek support, and maintain a positive effect even when circumstances are challenging. Agape love, as the greatest, underpins both faith and hope, providing the motivation and context for their enduring presence. It is the active expression of these virtues, transforming them from abstract concepts into live realities that foster psychological strength and a sustained positive outlook.

Application to Nigerian Context

The conceptual framework of Agape love as a psychological correlate of well-being holds significant relevance for the Nigerian context, offering a culturally resonant and potentially transformative approach to addressing the nation's well-being challenges. This model could be applicable in the following ways:

1. **Addressing Mental Health Stigma and Promoting Help-Seeking:** The pervasive stigma surrounding mental illness in Nigeria often prevents individuals from seeking professional help (Fadele *et al*., 2024: 3). The principles of Agape love, particularly kindness, compassion, and non-judgment, can help dismantle this stigma within religious communities. When congregants and leaders embody Agape, they create a safe and supportive environment where individuals feel accepted and understood, encouraging them to open up about their struggles and seek appropriate care. The emphasis on collective well-being inherent in Agape can also foster a sense of communal responsibility for mental health, leading to more proactive support systems.
2. **Fostering Resilience in the Face of Adversity:** Nigerians often face significant socio-economic challenges, including poverty, insecurity, and limited access to resources. The enduring qualities of Agape love patience, hope, and perseverance can serve as powerful psychological resources for resilience. When individuals draw upon these virtues, they are better equipped to cope with hardship, maintain a positive outlook, and continue striving for a better future. The belief in a loving God who provides hope can be a profound source of strength, enabling individuals to navigate difficult circumstances without succumbing to despair.
3. **Strengthening Social Cohesion and Community Support:** In a society with strong communal ties, Agape love can reinforce and enhance existing social support networks. The selfless nature of Agape encourages individuals to care for their neighbors, share resources, and provide practical and emotional support to those in need. This strengthens community bonds, reduces social isolation, and creates a safety net that contributes to collective well-being. The *Ifunanya* (Agape Love) therapy in the Igbo worldview, as described by Madubuike (2023: 71), exemplifies how this unconditional love is already recognised as essential for physical and mental health and social cohesion within a Nigerian cultural context.
4. **Promoting Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** Interpersonal conflicts, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances can significantly undermine well-being at both individual and societal levels. Agape love's characteristic of "keeping no record of wrongs" and its emphasis on truth and justice provide a framework for forgiveness and reconciliation. By fostering a spirit of forgiveness, individuals can release the psychological burden of resentment, leading to

emotional healing and improved relationships. This is crucial for building peaceful and harmonious communities.

5. **Cultivating Positive Self-Perception and Identity:** In contexts where individuals may face discrimination or marginalization, the unconditional acceptance inherent in Agape love can foster a strong sense of self-worth and a positive identity. When individuals understand that they are loved and valued unconditionally, it can counteract negative self-perceptions and promote psychological well-being, regardless of external circumstances or societal judgments.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study provides valuable insights into the psychological correlates of Agape love among Nigerians. The findings highlight the potential benefits of incorporating Agape love principles into mental health interventions and suggest avenues for further research. By fostering social support, emotional regulation and spiritual fulfilment, Agape love can contribute to enhanced psychological well-being in diverse cultural contexts. Hence, based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are hereby given:

i. **Curriculum Integration:** Religious institutions (churches, seminaries, Bible colleges) should integrate the psychological dimensions of Agape love into their curricula and sermons. This can educate congregants on how biblical principles directly contribute to mental health and healthy relationships, fostering a more holistic understanding of faith.

ii. **Faith-Based Counselling:** Counsellors and therapists, particularly those working within faith-based organisations in Nigeria can incorporate the principles of Agape love into their therapeutic approaches. This can provide a culturally sensitive framework for addressing issues such as interpersonal conflict, self esteem, forgiveness, and the development of positive coping mechanisms.

iii. **Community-Based Programmes:** Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community development initiatives can design programs that leverage the communal aspect of Agape love to build stronger social support networks, promote altruism, and foster collective resilience in vulnerable communities. This could include initiatives focused on mutual aid, conflict resolution, and mental health awareness campaigns framed within the context of unconditional love.

iv. **Leadership Training:** Training programmes for religious and community leaders should emphasize the importance of embodying Agape love in their leadership, promoting an environment of kindness, empathy, and non-judgment. This can help dismantle mental health stigma and encourage open dialogue about well-being within their communities.

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LIVING TOGETHER IN AFRICAN COSMOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF IGBO LAND

By

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Abstract

This study examines the Igbo concept of communal living which remains homo-eccentric and human centered ethical model with a holistic approach to both economic and social security engrafted in social structures. This social ethics is a revolutionary concept which the blind can see, the deaf can hear, and which the lame can identify, and appropriate. This human centered body politics which inspires and empowers Ndigbo to draw on moral osmosis to engage in social transformation, nation-building, and sustainable development is constitutive in the religious dimension of community in the traditional Igbo background. This study was prompted by the general decline in public morality which does not only remove interdependence, reciprocity, and equality, but also depreciate, degenerate, and degrade human dignity. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to investigate and unearth the primordial affirmation of the truth about our moral heritage with a new appreciation of its worth and role in the traditional Igbo society. This study using descriptive and sociological methods, betook itself to explore this concept that gives rise to the idea of collective responsibility, inter-dependence, and human living which among others promotes discipline, reduces crime, and humanizes relations. The findings reveals that the concept also inspires Ndigbo to look up to the future with hope and expectation for a good reward here and hereafter. The study emphasizes the effects of erosion of cultural values particularly in the bonds of inter-personal and inter-group relationships resulting in ungodly philosophies such as extreme individualism, materialism, secularism, consumerism, and the prioritization of wealth over persons which became its hallmark. Therefore, the study recommends the incorporation of Igbo spirituality and consciousness of human dignity to remove alienation, deprivation, and oppression now prevalent in contemporary society.

Key words: African Cosmology, Communalism, Humane Living, Inter-dependence, Human Dignity.

Introduction

The sense of community and humane living are highly cherished values of traditional African life. This statement remains true in spite of the apparent disarray in the experience of modern politics and brutal internecine wars in many parts of the continent. For traditional Africans, the community is basically sacred, rather than secular, and surrounded by live away from the communities of their home-towns (Shorter, 1975; Ejizu, 2003). In particular, every Igbo man necessarily lives in two worlds. He is not only a member of a family, he is also a member of a community, a state, and a world. He is not only a private person; he is a public citizen. Generally, Ndigbo do not like the monks, hermits, and ascetics deliberately turn their backs on life and on men and women to live in the deserts, on tree tops, pillar tops, caves, and caverns (Barclay; 1971). Rather like other Africans, traditional Igbo possess "the basic instinct of gregariousness with the rest of human-kind. Families and members of kin groups from minimal to maximal lineages, generally live together and form community" (Ejizu; 2003:2). Every Igbo is born into a community where the person shares in the community life, spirit, and collective responsibility (Onwu, 2002).

The individual is in the first place a member of his community and is defined by his community. This is exemplified in the existence of community farmlands, streams, economic trees, barns, markets, shrines, masquerades, ritual objects, festivals, myths, customs, traditions and beliefs. The understanding of the traditional Igbo about the community is that it is "a unity of the visible and invisible, the world of the physical living on the one hand and the world of the ancestors,

divinities and the souls of children yet to be born to the individual kin group" (Isiramen; 2010:459). Buthelezi (1991) in Okoro (2014:3) explicates more on this Igbo concept of wholeness and integrative nature of all things when he asserts that;

> *It is often rightly been said that Africans have a sense of wholeness of life. The traditional African religion was characterized by the motif of the wholeness of life . . . the continuity of fellowship between the living and the dead were analogous to the interplay between the natural and the supernatural worlds. Life was such a whole that not even death could disintegrate it.*

Notably, the Igbo have a cosmic view of life and as such all beings that exist came into being through a common source. Accordingly, they conceive man to be basically and essentially a being in relation, a social being, '*sue generis*' in Durkheimian language (Uchegbue, 2009).

In keeping with this view, Omoyajowo (1975) rightly points out that today be cut off from one's natural relation with the soil and with society is seen as a curse similar to that laid upon Cain in the Bible. It is the African's incorporation in society that really makes him a man and forms his self-perception and self-interpretation. It is in keeping with this understanding of man that Ray (1988) opines that the African believes that "I am because we are, and since we are, I am. I exist because I belong to a large group or I am not alone and since I am not alone, I realize that I am alive and I exist" (Uchegbue; 2009:124). Admittedly, the Igbo lives in community. It needs to be stressed that this love of company is no doubt one of the chief causes for the existence of innumerable societies, clubs, and vital public institutions in Igbo land. The people under study here presently live within the South East of Nigeria. The Igbo geographical area is what scholars call a culture area; rural or urban, manifesting distinctive characteristics or traits. According to Onwu (2002:2) "the Igbo see themselves as one people and at the same time, outsiders see them as a homogeneous entity. They are a unique people."

Eze (2013:190-191) underscores the important belief and sense of the community among the Igbo thus:

> *A person is a person through other people strikes an affirmation of one's humanity through the recognition of an 'other' in his or her uniqueness and difference. It is a demand for a creative inter subjective formation in which the 'other' becomes a mirror (but only as a mirror) for my subjectivity. This idealism suggests to us that humanity is not embedded in my person solely as an individual; my humanity is co-substantively bestowed upon to each other. We create each other and need to sustain this otherness creation. And if we belong to each other, we participate in our common creation; we are because you are and since you are, definitely I am. The 'I am' is not a rigid subject but a dynamic self-constitution dependent on this otherness creation of relation and distance.*

The implication of the above thesis which explicitly defines the basic hermeneutical understanding of communalism is that, the Igbo define themselves within the community of other people and not just as individuals within a community. Okoro (2014:5) reiterates that "it is this notion that makes the individual to be rooted in the community that one's personal identity is defined by what you give to the community." Against this background, researches similar to the present study had been carried out by various scholars. Ejizu (2003) examines African Traditional Religions and the promotion of community living. Akpomurie (2009) highlights the role of age grades and communitarian values in rural development. On the other hand, Uchegbue (2009) focuses on the concept of man's spiritual companions in Igbo traditional thought.

After an in-depth analysis of the various empirical literature, it was found out that a gap exists in literature. Instructively, none of these studies considered living together in African cosmology an Igbo example. This is the yawning gap this study seeks to fill. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to explore the Igbo communitarian values which remains *homo*-eccentric and human centred ethical model with a holistic approach. On this note, this study using descriptive and sociological methods betook itself to do a critical examination on the theory and practice of communal living in traditional Igbo communities. To achieve this, the study adopted a qualitative method of social research. It is theoretical in nature. Secondary sources of data collection were

equally employed to give the study the needed attention. The data were generated through journal publications, textbooks, internet sources, and participant observations. And now the elephant in the room is: what factors are involved in this distinct socio-cultural ideological framework? What are the effects of the erosion of this *homo*-eccentric and human centered ethical model in contemporary society? This study spotlights that there is a somewhat 'holy grail' that binds all persons of all Igbo communities, regardless of social status, creed, clan, and sex together in an inseparable manner (Okoro; 2014).

According to Okorocha (1992:168-169) what exists is a "total way of life characterized by interchangeableness and mutuality in all aspects of life. Communalism or *Onyeaghala Nwanneya* (Igbo) or the *harambe (Kikuju)* motif remains the font of collective life and existence." This is crucial because it defines in practical terms Igbo ideology of community living. Nonetheless, the study discovered that the infiltration of modern technology, the neglect of moral instructions in various families and institutions of learning as well as the undue imposition of the western economic capitalist system have given rise to the erosion of communitarian values in contemporary society. Accordingly, driving from the Igbo experience, this study recommends the appropriateness of the incorporation of spirituality and consciousness of human dignity as bases of the community in contemporary society. The study is structured into five sections. Following the introduction, section two is the conceptual framework. Section three espouses the Igbo communitarian values, while section four presents the analysis of the study and discussion of findings. Section five is the conclusion.

The Conceptual Framework

Communalism is the practice in traditional Igbo society which values community togetherness, solidarity, and care for one another. The traditional Igbo had a deep sense of community. The popular sentiment among the Igbo as found in most other African societies is as Mbiti (1990:106) correctly puts it, "I am because we are and since we are, therefore I am." This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man. Accentuating to this fact, Onwu (2002) writes that individual existence and freedom are appreciated, but they are delicately balanced with the underlying philosophy of life-in-community. This life-in-community is captured by the Igbo concept of *Umunna/Umunne/Ikwunne. Umunna is* a spiritual idea embedded in Igbo origin. The concept of democracy (*Oha, Umunnakwuru*) which is contained in Igbo philosophy of republicanism is deeply rooted in Igbo life and through as embodied in the *Umunna* concept. This perspective represents a distinctly African socio-cultural ideological framework and the bedrock of Igbo communalism. Gyekye (1996) lends credence to this assumption as he conceives communalism as

> *The doctrine or theory that the community (or group) is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society. This places emphasis on activity and the success of the wider society, not necessarily to the detriment of the individual, but rather to the well-being of every individual member of the society (Eze and Chukwuma; 2013:96)*

Inferably, communalism is derived from this intrinsic value for human life and the network of community and interrelatedness linking every aspect of cosmic order.

Additionally, Madukwe and Madukwe (2010:279) affirm that communalism denotes concern for "human beings and their well-being. There is a care for one by all. There is the bearing of one another's burden and everyone is his brother's keeper. There is a mutual assistance for one another." The haves help those who do not have so that no one perishes because of wants while his next door neighbor lives in affluence. There is sharing of virtually everything. This form of existence permeates all aspects of Igbo life and is expressed in diverse ways in their social and economic relationships. For example, land was communally owned and individuals who owned land never sold them. Putting this in perspective, certain cash crops such as oil bean *(ugba),* apple (*udara*), pear (*Ube*), bread fruit (*ukwa*), and kola nut *(oji)* though may be privately owned they were for public use. Those who owned them were not at all to cut them or destroyed them at will without

serious sanctions from the community. No individual has the right to take his life. Suicide was a taboo and whenever it occurred serious ritual cleansing was carried out to placate the offended earth-goddess (*Ala*). The clear surmise is that for the Igbo, in their social life the expressions: (*onye aghala nwanne ya)* (be your brother's keeper), *Igwe bu ike/Oha bu ike* (there is strength in multitude), *so m adina* (let me not exist alone), *umunna bu ike* (one's relations are a source of strength), *Oha ka mma* (the community is ideal), *and umenwanne* (the tender feeling of one's kins) among others, allude to the fact that no man is an island and that life is not lived in isolation.

It shows that communalism was "preferred to individualism. Life was lived in a community and it emphasized corporate personality against individuality" (Okwor and Onah; 2012:167). Onwu (2002:9) corroborates that the Igbo ideology of interdependence recognizes that unity is strength – *oha/igwe bu ike*, it among others promotes discipline, reduces crime, and humanizes relationships. Although Igbo religion recognizes personal/individual salvation, but it exists mainly for the preservation of the collective life (*umunna/Ikwunne*) and of the community *(Oha*). The critical point here is that respect for religious philosophy inspires them to look up to the future with hope and expectation for a good reward here and hereafter. On this premise, Okwor and Onah (2012:166) note that "people assisted their neighbors without charge in building their huts in the farmland, in marriage, in child upbringing, during occasions for joy or sorrow. The guiding principle of living in the community was 'I am because we are.'" In this vein, the different individuals' socio-political units are closely knit together. This collaborative tendency among the Igbo has been described by some scholars as African humanism.

According to Aboyade (1980) in Akpomurie (2009:200) African humanism

> *Elevates the human factor of production to the level of participation in the development process by viewing production as an inseparable part of distributive relations. It seeks to achieve egalitarianism through a deep sense of man's responsibility to his community. Through the holistic approach to economic and social relations, it attempts to blend individual and social morality as a basis for social consensus and social action.*

Flowing from this idea, communalism is the community consciousness and solidarity by all for one and one for all in traditional Igbo society. Ostensibly, there is no conceptual tension between the common good and the good of the individual members of the community, for the common good embraces the basic goods of all the members of the community. Accordingly, if the common good were understood as the basic good, Gyekye (2010:16) subsumes that there "would be no need to think of it as a threat to individual liberty as touted by Western liberal thinkers, for, after all, individual liberty is held as one of the basic goods of the members of the society." It is worth elaborating this point a little. Igbo social ethics is expressed in many maxims that emphasize the importance of the values of mutual helpfulness, collective responsibility, cooperation, inter-dependence, and reciprocal obligations. For example, the Igbo proverb, *mmadu no ndu, maka ibe ya*, that is, one exists because of and for the other is non-negotiable because to be, is to belong. Hence, human development is their watchword (Ndukwe; 2011).

As a result of this ontological bond, individuals in African communalism have social responsibility towards one another as well as towards the entire community. This, however, does not imply that the hold which the community has over the individual was so constrictive that the expression of his individuality is muzzled and completely frustrated. Rather, there was a harmonious synthesis of individualism and communalism. This implies that African communalism is quite distinct from the Rousseauan collectivistic, totalitarian general will; the Hegelian totalitarian whole, and the Marxian self-alienating communism (Ezedike; 2009). African communalism, in its universal sense, is co-extensive; there is consensus and constant consultation covering every aspects of their lives from individual to group levels – including marriage, education, and funeral (Onwu; 2002). Against this background, the traditional Igbo cosmology is the basis of indigenous Igbo social, ethical, political, and religious attitude which remain relevant in contemporary society. To underscore this, Onyibor (2016:113) remarks that "the concept of the world whether sensible or

supra-sensible held by a people in a given culture has a vital influence on their attitude to and evaluation of life and death."

Okafor (1992) in Onyibor (2016) equally asserts that "cosmological and meta-physical ideas determine the basic notions underlying our cultural, religious, and social activities. In fact, these notions necessarily though, sometimes covertly shape our behavior and thus guide our actions." Accordingly, Igbo cosmology is basically anchored on perception vis-a-vis assumptions or beliefs. Admittedly, Igbo perception of their world determines their attitudes and actions. Similarly, Uchendu (1965) holds that Igbo cosmological perception is not only their theory of the origin and character of the universe, it also contains perception for the societal moral ethos, which dictate rules governing both interpersonal relationship as well as man's relationship to his environment and to the supra-sensible. Moreover, in it is to be found the explanations for the family background patterns of Ndigbo. From the above analysis, cosmology as used in this study means a philosophical theory which studies the material world with regards to its origin, structure, and ultimate end. It suffices here to state that the fundamentals of Igbo traditional cosmology consist of belief in the Supreme Being, *Chukwu,* belief in the reality of the ancestors, and existence of spirits, both good and evil, belief in duality, belief in reincarnation *(ilo uwa*), and choice of destiny. This opens the door to Igbo communitarian model.

Igbo Communitarian Values

Among the many Igbo communitarian values, only the following will be discussed.

i. African Family Structure

In the African social structure, family is an esoteric community that emphasizes the web of a pedigree. Such as community may be by consanguinity, affinity or fosterage. The main essence of calling it a family is to give every member a sense of belonging and that of security. When family becomes larger than what a compound or a village can accommodate, it becomes a clan. Thus, family life is central in their worldview. Opata (1998) in (Eze; 2012:75*)* posits that family life is

> *Very central in Igbo life and thought. One can say that Igbo make a great show of the family, children of their parents, and parents of their children, children of their brothers and sisters as well as of other relatives, clans' people, and in-laws.*

The family structure in traditional Igbo society is a tie on the members. His father is not just the person biologically responsible for his conception. His mother is not necessarily the woman who physically gave him birth. According to Sarpong (2014:6) he may have as many as fifteen

> *Fathers and ten mothers. In the ideal situation, each one of these would treat him as his biological father or mother would. Since he has several 'mothers' and 'fathers', obviously he has many more brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces. In fact, in some African languages, the words cousin, aunt, uncle, do not exist. One's father's brother is one's father and one's mother's sister is one's mother. Therefore, the African family is very much extended.*

This implies that the average African considers himself as his brother's keeper.

Accordingly, the wholesome human relationships can be "found within the institution of the family. The extended family system is still being practiced in many African communities today" (Uduigwomen; 2009:559). This is the reason why in African cultures the word 'brother' is used to cover various and complex family relationship linked by blood ties. But the word is also used, significantly, by persons between whom there are no blood ties, thus, the word is used comprehensively. Gyekye (2010:13) elaborates more by saying that the comprehensive meaning given to the word 'brother' in African cultures is "intended, indeed, to lift people up from the purely biologically determined blood relation level onto the human level, the level where the essence of humanity is held as transcending the contingencies of human biology, race, ethnicity or culture." The common membership of one universal human family constitutes a legitimate basis for the idea of universal human brotherhood. This idea is depicted in the Igbo maxim: *Agbata obi mmadu bu nwanne ya*, that is, your neighbor is your brother.

The Igbo adage: *Egbe bere ugo bere, nke si ibe ya ebela, nku kwa ya*, that is, "Both the eagle and the kite should perch; whichever denies the other the right should suffer a broken wing", which its equivalent in English is: "Live and let live" says it all. The point being emphasized is that the traditional extended family is cooperative in spirit and practice. Okwueze (2004:246) makes an apt submission thus, "marriage, pregnancy, childbearing, upbringing, and training of children, respect and obedience to parents and elders, building and maintaining relationships, protecting the norms of the community are all sacred religious obligations in traditional societies." Understandably, there are no lazy or idle persons in the community. Each person is taught to share whatever he has with other members of the extended family and each person is expected to contribute his quota to the common pool. Uduigwewomen (2009:560) has furthered the position by saying that no one is "expected to sit back on the labor of others, those who do their best but cannot make any contribution to the common pool are however protected and not made to suffer want."

Apparently, marriage and family life were therefore the structure upon which the moral growth of the society depended and only the conception of marriage and family relationship as sacred religious relationship sustained this. For example, it was socially impossible to find an orphan in traditional Igbo society. This is because those upon who this "responsibility to take over the moral upbringing of the biological orphaned fall on saw same as their sacred duty and obligation to be everything known as father and mother to the biological orphan" (Okwueze, 2004; 274). Amadi (1982:58) explains that as a result of this system

> *The individual was never without help. No one was absolutely destitute, so the kind of insanity that is caused by the pressures of urban life and by loneliness was virtually unknown in rural Nigeria. In a system which had no asylums, poor houses or old people homes, the eagle and kite system proved very effective*.

It is clear, then, that the wealth of the family was communally and collectively produced, owed and enjoyed through its rituals, taboos, powerful public opinion and sanctions as noted earlier.

Furthermore, Okwueze (2004) and Nwankwo (2022) have identified the family unit as a vehicle of moral education among the Igbo. According to them, in the family, every grown-up member has a moral obligation to give moral advice to all other younger members. This training usually starts from early childhood. Continuing, the authors add that the village owes it as her responsibility to control the behavior of its members in order to maintain the morals and values of the society. The village exerts wider influence in the moral education. The culture of multiple parenting in Igbo traditional society is based on the concept of *nwa bu nwa oha* (a child belongs to all). It is in this respect, Degbey (2011) in Eze (2012:74) opines that "in traditional system there is hardly the illegitimate child. Even where parents are dead, a child would always have parents – a cushion against the odds." Eze (2012:74-75) makes the interesting point that

> *The pattern and system obtainable in traditional Igbo society make it obligatory culturally for the society to bear the responsibility of the child's upbringing. In the training cipher, the social and moral norms of the community are defined. This helps to safeguard the material and spiritual norms, customs, and traditions which are used to shape the child into a moral conscious being.*

A practical translation of the idea of brotherhood leads to such social and moral virtues as hospitality, generosity, concern for others, and communal feeling.

ii. Respect for the Sanctity of Human Life

In view of the premium placed on human life by all notable religions of the world and particularly Igbo traditional religion, no one is empowered to take human life. Instead, it should be preserved under every circumstance. Ndukwe (1964) in Ekwue (2006:42) remarks thus, "the whole tune of the philosophy of most African people is life affirming." For example, the names, *Ndubisi* (life is supreme), *Ndukaku* (life is greater than wealth), and *Ndubueze* (life is king) express the premium the Igbo attach on life. As Ilogu (1974:173) rightly puts it, "*Ndu* or life is the *summum bonum*." Njoku (2001) in Asuquo (2009:347) summarizes the Igbo concept of life as follows:

> *God is the originator of life, the Creator of man, the universe, and the sustainer of creation . . . Life is meaningless without land; this includes land, and all other*

> *properties which make life worth living. Life is a communal affair. It involves a relationship and communion between man, God, ancestors, divinities, other men and the land. This relationship, must be based on certain rules and regulations for it to succeed.*

As a corollary, Onwu (2002:9) argues brilliantly thus, Igbo world is "principally anthropocentric. It is for this understanding the *Igbo say Ndu bu isi* (life first). Due to the heavy accent which the traditional Igbo place on human life, they go to any length in order to preserve it.

This development Onwu (2002) plausible argues, makes the Igbo respect life more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria. Since the Igbo respect life, kolanut breaking will always remain for them a celebration of life. Onwu (2002:7) lent emphasis on the great respect the Igbo have for life when he said that:

> *Onye wetara oji wetara ndu (he who brings kola brings life). Among the Igbo, everything that is, has a life and to be alive is the aspiration of every living thing. Oji (kolanut) is life because he who brings it brings life in the dual sense that signifies welcome and friendship and that the prayer for good and long life which precede its breaking and eating would be accepted by the ancestors.*

It is in this light that the Igbo fought a thirty months gruesome war from 1967-1970 to preserve the life of the Igbo people. In the same vein, notable Igbo leaders of blessed memory unanimously agreed that "To Restore the Dignity of man" was to be the motto of the first indigenous university, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. That motto represents the finest formulation of the finest Igbo minds, the collective affirmation of Igbo faith in the worth and dignity of man. It remains for the Igbo a vision, a mission, and a commitment.

Consequently, norms are couched to protect life from violation. The first norm is to treasure life that is, respect for life or dignity of life. The second is to support each other including animal and plants jealously and to do the utmost in one's power (Okoro; 2013). In a significant sense then, these ethical values on the sanctity of life moves life from the sphere of materiality and gives it a transcendent reference. For instance, the import of the Igbo names *Ndukaku* (life is greater than wealth), *Ndubis*i (life is supreme) will suppress environmental degradation, security threats, wars, conflicts, separatist agitations, and terrorist attacks. Otherwise, the country's unity and progress will continue to be threatened until the core values that promote law and order, respect for elders, and sanctity of human lives, brotherliness, honesty, and respect for tolerance are appreciated and adhered to. Overtly, people will stop seeing themselves from individualistic stances but also from materialistic stances. This seems to be the origin of '*omenala*' (custom of the land) which is derived from the Mother Earth (*Ala)* and sanctioned by the ancestors (*ndichie)*. Omenala in Igbo land contains prohibitions which regulate human behavior, maintain purity, and sustain community life. These prohibitions are known as *Nso Ala* (taboos). They also involve seasonal celebrations like *Iri ji* (new yam festival) and *Igo Aro* (new year celebrations). Onwu (2002:9) claims that the essence of Igbo morality was "primarily to keep the harmony, well-being, and effective co-existence of members of the 'community' made up of the living, the dead ancestors, and children yet unborn. The implication is that among the Igbo, *Omenala* is communal rather than individual." When colonialism failed to harness her charismatic resources to address these issues and merely sought to reconstruct elements of the world view, the danger of failure lurked closely.

Erosion of Communitarian Values in Contemporary Society

The finding of the study reveals that the Igbo communitarian ideality to a great extent has been eroded by the advent of Western culture and civilization. Expectedly, the culture conflicts the Igbo sub-nation are experiencing nowadays. Okoro (2008:215) rightly affirms that

> *There is no gain-saying the fact that majority of the Nigerian populace are beset with psycho-somatic trauma, occasioned by the undue imposition of the western economic capitalistic system, which not only is at variance with our values and world views but also contradicts it. The Western economic paradigm aims overly at the systematic marginalization of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular.*

In a similar reaction, Isiramen (2010:464) asserts that "the foregoing influences occasioned by commerce, colonialism, and foreign religious among the Igbo have affected reverence for community life and the spiritual beings in business matters." For instance, some Igbo, who have embraced Christianity, distance themselves from indigenous religion and castigated those that have remained faithful as people destined for hell. The story of Enoch in Chinua Achebe's '*Things Fall Apart'* illustrates how some Igbo Christians began to turn against their culture in apparent response and agreement to the new civilization. Enoch was under suspicion of killing and eating the sacred python. He went further to desecrate and unmask the *Ogwugwu* masquerade in the public. The disregard for the community and disrespect for its ethics became the order of the day.

Apart from questioning traditional norms, new mores have been introduced through globalization and urbanization which ushered into Igbo community what Shorter (1990) in Isiramen (2009:465) *describes* as

> *Four tragedies of Africa - pollution, impoverishment, disorientation and secularization and these have led to one of the greatest problems of Igbo communalism. Urbanization and money economy have given rise to new ideals, new ethics and new patterns of living as well as new socio-economic possibilities.*

Consequently, this study notes that the enviable tradition of community before individuals have metamorphosed into ungodly philosophies such as tribalism, individualism, god-fatherism, humanism, materialism, consumerism; and the prioritization of wealth over persons have become its hallmark. Evidently, sense of community has been replaced by acute individualism. Mutual antagonism has created a situation that has transformed the ideals of 'all' to 'oneself', and an increasing 'jungle mentality' where the only governing principle is to 'survive by all means'. It is only against this backdrop that one can possibly explain the increasing propensity towards great selfishness, indiscipline, dishonesty, ritual killings, kidnapping, baby factories, child and women trafficking, electoral and examination malpractices and different forms of fraudulent practices now prevalent in Igbo community (Ezedike, 2009; Isiramen, 2010, Iroanya; 2022; Nwankwo; 2022).

In a similar contribution, Ugwu and Ugwueye (2004:133) state that

> *Traditional sanctions and taboos are no longer treasured and a new way of life begins which leads to a new kind of morality. Unchastely which at a time was a grievous crime, now appears to be the order of the day. Respect for elders is on the decline. Traditional hospitality and generosity, which make each his brother's keeper is replaced by a new morality which stresses selfishness as a virtue. Almost all that is good in traditional society is lost to Western civilization.*

This view is buttressed by Oduyoye (2001:95) when she said that "all has changed, other cultures, other styles, of life, modernity, the technology we acquire with brutality, especially in the urban areas, have undermined the goodwill that was the origin of hospitality. They are incompatible with traditional African hospitality". Ejizu (2003:15) scathingly denounces the prevailing radical social change when he quips that "the destabilization of the traditional religions have clearly left wide gaps in the social structure particularly in the bonds of interpersonal and inter-group relationship". Accordingly, African societies are visibly in a state of transition, a stage of betwixt and between, with the attendant anxiety, tension and confusion being felt at virtually every facet of life of the people.

Conclusion

In this study, we have engaged in a hermeneutical exposition on communalism which permeates, pervades, and animates the traditional social institutions, norms, and celebrations in Igbo land. The study noted that the guiding principles of living together in Igbo cosmology are, 'I am because the community is' and from 'each according to his ability, and to each according to his needs.' The social cohesion and solidarity resulting from the communal living, enhanced the community spirit of the Igbo, and offered the individual both economic and social security. In the light of the foregoing, we reach the conclusion that Igbo communitarianism is positive, result-oriented, and is a recipe for maintaining social order and just society. It builds strong foundation for

personal, interpersonal, organizational, national, and international peace-building. Regrettably, the study discovered that the situation has changed radically today.

The influence of colonialism, globalization, foreign religions, and cultures which began with the incursion into Igbo land by the colonial masters in the late eighteenth century AD, has impacted seriously on their socio-political and religious thought and life. Consequently, ungodly philosophies such as extreme individualism, god motherism/fatherism, materialism, consumerism, and the prioritization of wealth over persons have become its hallmark. Resultantly, there is the loss of freedom, self-respect and dignity. There is also marginalization, poverty, and deprivation, the exploitation of women and child abuse, robbery and corruption as well as injustice, which removes interdependence, reciprocity, and equality. Against this backdrop, this study recommends the incorporation of Igbo spirituality and consciousness of human dignity to remove alienation, deprivation, and oppression occasioned by the undue imposition of the western economic capitalistic system on the contemporary society.

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Theatricality and Social Functions in *Erishi* Festival of the Ase Community in Delta State

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Abstract

This paper explores the theatricality and social functions in Erishi Festival of Ase in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. Festivals are integral to the cultural life of a people; they establish identity and foster social cohesion. Although the Erishi Festival is largely unknown outside Delta State, it remains a unifying event that embodies both social functions and theatrical elements. Unfortunately, some scholars of African traditions have downplayed the potential of indigenous festivals due to the long-standing debate over Western notions of what constitutes drama. Consequently, there is little recognition of the value of such festivals beyond their entertainment aspects. This study adopts Richard Schechner's Performance Theory and Aristotle's Theory of Drama as its theoretical framework, employing literary and analytical methodologies. The findings reveal that the Erishi Festival embodies numerous social functions and theatrical elements. The paper recommends that scholars of African traditions should look beyond the entertainment dimension, since the festival encapsulates rich cultural values capable of fostering socio-cultural transformation within the African universe.

Key Words: Social Functions, Festivals, Rituals, Theatrical Elements, Performance

Introduction

Festivals serve primarily as aspects of the cultural antecedents of a people; they establish identity and foster social cohesion. In Africa, as in other regions, festivals are as artistic as they are cultural. In Delta State, within the South-South Zones of Nigeria, numerous festivals play significant functional roles. Among them, the *Erishi* Festival of the Ase community in Ndokwa East Local Government Area stands out. Although the festival is unknown outside Delta State, it remains a unifying event with profound social functions and theatrical elements. Notably, the *Erishi* Festival functions not merely as ritual or entertainment but as a way of life for the Ase people. This study emphasizes that indigenous African festivals such as *Erishi* have not been sufficiently appreciated, despite their demonstrable capacity for fascination and cultural transformation. Early African scholars such as Soyinka, Senghor, Adelugba, Uyovbukri, Ukala, and Ododo explored the rich performative values of African culture, often in the face of Western critical frameworks that dismissed the bulk of African performance as unarguably fit to be ascribed theatre until they have

been constructively "modernized". According to Okoye (2010), the nature of this modernity is of course:

> the excision of all ritualistic, contingent and presentational forms and elaboration of the mythic, narrative "germs" into a structurally concise, narratively coherent and cognitive experiences (p.3).

Evolutionist scholars used such arguments to suggest that African festivals, though rich in cultural values and dramatic potential, were not yet fully developed theatre. This view aligns with Finnegan's (1970) assertion that African traditional festivals contain "dramatic and quasi-dramatic phenomena," though lacking the formalized structures of Western theatre as defined by Aristotle in the *Poetics*. It is worth recalling that Greek and European theatres themselves emerged from ritual celebrations with functional roles, mirroring the fabric of African traditional religious and ritual performances. Nearly all African traditional performances are grounded in religious values, akin to the Great Dionysia of 5th-century B.C. Greece (Banham et al., 1994). This confers African traditional performances, including the *Erishi* Festival, with a universal appeal.

Theoretical Framework

> Western theories on drama have been identified as merely footnotes of Aristotle's theory of drama. This arises from a robust review carried out on the works of foremost theorists like Horace, Gassner, Scaliger, Gustav, Sardou, Castelvetro, Zola, Gotthold, Nietzsche and many others, whose contribution to drama show a resounding amplification of Aristotle's theory of drama found in the *poetics* (Agha,p.38).

The framework of the study is anchored on Aristotle's (384-322B.C.) theory of drama and the performance theory of Richard Schechner (1973). It is no exaggeration to say that history of tragic criticism is a series of footnotes of Aristotle in a fragmentary treatise called the *Poetics* (Barnet et al,1998). In that treatise the point raised and subsequently argued by Aristotle has indeed become the foundation of drama, where he highlighted six elements that every drama must possess. He gave the elements as Plot, Character, Thought, Language, Music and Spectacle. According to Aristotle (384-322B.C.**) plot** is the whole structure of the incidents and remains the first in the consideration of the most important of drama, followed by **character** which is a factor that enable us to define the particular quality of the people involved in the doing (incidents).This quality is made manifest in whom they are, what they do and stand for especially at the metaphysical plane, the next is **thought** presented as the ability to say what circumstances allow for and what is appropriate to them**. Language** is words use from the disposition of dialogue and it remains sacrosanct as one of the chief means of communication in drama. **Music** and **spectacle** reinforces beauty in the overall precept of drama. Aristotle in the same vein have also argue for a well-plotted incidents which must not begin or end casually but must follow a pattern which he calls, a beginning, a middle, and an end, later depicted in Gustav Freytag's dramatic pyramid. With incidents captured as exposition, complication, climax and denourment or resolution. According to Aristotle, a **beginning** is that which does not itself necessary follow anything else, but which leads naturally to another event or incident, while an **end** is the opposite, that which itself naturally either of necessity or most common follow something else, but nothing else comes after it. A **middle** is that which itself follows something else and is followed by another thing (p.738).

Schechner's Performance Theory (1973) broadens the conception of drama to include all events involving performers, audiences, and contexts, he emphasizes that performance is "the whole event, including audience, performers (technicians too, anyone who is there)". His theory also adduces performance to be something planned and designed for presentation (p.20). According to the summation of Schechner (1973), a performance could be ritualized taking the form of secular or sacred rituals or could either tilt to the theatrical, wading into the mimetic form or the use of dialogue. Following the above opinion, he says whether a specific performance is

> "ritual" or "theatre" depends mostly on context or function. A performance is called theatre or ritual because of where it is performed, by whom and under what circumstances (p.622).

He, therefore, relates performance to what it is capable of achieving. He says "if the performance is to effect transformation, to heal or to appease or appeal to transcendent others (gods, ancestors, divine royalty, etc) to get result, then the quality listed under the heading " efficacy" will most probably prevail and the performance may be regarded as a ritual. Conversely, if the quality listed under" entertainment" prevails, it may be regarded as theatre (p.622). The consequential nature of the above aspects of Schechner's discussion has necessitated the researcher's classification of *Erishi* as ritual/theatre in its own right following his performance theory. His effused position on the relationship between ritual and performance has affirmed clearly his resolve that ritual is performance, because:

> they are acts done; and performances are ritualized: they are codified, repeatable actions. The function of theatre identified by Aristotle and Horace- entertainment, celebration, enhancement of social solidarity, education, (including political education and healing) are also functions of rituals (p.613).

Schechner, have also been able to argue that the thrust of theatre is inseparable from ritual because it is linked with the tradition of the people. Tradition, has been repeatedly defined as "anything that is handed down from the past to the present and then the future" (Etuk, 2002) .Schechner, acknowledged the complexity in defining 'performance' because, he believed that the boundaries separating it on one side of the theatre and on the other from everyday life are arbitrary. Based on that, he categorized performance as a definite dance step and shouts, a known style of singing, an over-all pattern consisting of accepted sequences of events. He further grouped performance as an intentional, emotionally expressive event-centered phenomenon involving pattern and attention in social interaction (p.89).

Erishi as Ritual and a Theatre Performance

This study reveals that *Erishi* embodies performance art through different artistic forms to recreate situations of a live performance often involving a variety of mediums, which incidentally falls within the performative index of Schechner's (1973) classification of what entails performance. This study establishes *Erishi* festival as a ritual performance which is capable of becoming theatre, because it fulfills both functions. First, as a festival with theatrical elements theorized by Aristotle such as: dance, music, spectacle, character, dialogue and plot. Secondly, as a festival that functions as ritual, evolving the sacred forms of ritualized expressions such as the use of: masquerades, incantations, chants, songs, purification, trance and possession as a means of suspending the peoples beliefs in keeping with the spiritual essence of the festival, which is a pact keeping ceremony of the water people and the veneration of the positive forces that have kept their universe aglow. *Erishi*

festival is celebrated when the rains subside, typically between May and June, marking the expectation of harvest. Beyond ritual devotion, the festival also fosters social interaction through gift exchanges, visitations, renewed friendships, and communal feasting, thereby strengthening unity.

Historical Origin of *Erishi* Festival

Erishi festival is an aged long traditional ritual performance of the *Eboh(s)* living in Ase community in Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria. The celebration is entirely a pact keeping ceremony and an annual veneration of their small gods (*Usuei*, *Igerige*, and *Okpotu*), whose image permeate the identity of the people and their cosmology. *Erishi* is the main festival of the Ase people and it is observed annually when the rains have lessened or the periods of high expectation of harvest according to the vegetational prospects of the people.

One belief that still hold sway amongst Ase(s) about the origin of *Erishi* is that it was bequeathed on them by the water people (mermaids), who in their bid to announce their existence to the human society revealed themselves to two fishermen, who were later used as a representation of the human society to establish a pact with the water world. These fishermen were imbued with the gift of an inner eye (transcendental insight) to populate the evidences of their existence through the *Erishi* dance to the human society. In the same vein, Ukala (2010) submits that;

> the same stories are told in a community with an infinite number of variations, and both the retailers and consumers may never tire of (it and this) goes side by side with the construction of relatively fresh tales (p. 23).

The festival period does not only signify celebration of *Erishi*, but of life which portray the very quintessence of the people's existence. However, during this period there is a general exchange of gifts, felicitation, renewed friendships, visitations and plenty to eat and drink. To a large extent, these act symbolizes a renewal of bonds of unity, it gives participants the opportunity to reunite with their kith and kin and also rededicate themselves to the spirit of their common heritage. In the words of Amankulor (1985), festivals serve as "a periodic or occasional celebration, merry-making or feast day of special significance in the cultural calendar of the celebrant" (p.83).

Erishi Myth

The myth of *Erishi* ritual performance is an encounter between two forces, one representing the water world and the other the human world. The mythos establish that two fishermen were supposedly captured for spying on the activities of the water clan, an act which is gravely believed to undermine the sanctity of the water world and the serenity of their existence. So, for this reason they were detained and later arraigned before their court for charges of trespass and other related offenses. They were fortunately set free of their conviction when the jury (elders) perceived the humaneness and the ignorance behind their motives. But their plea to be set free was given concern on the condition that they make a pact with the clan, promising to populate the true nature of their existence on their return to the human world, instituting an aspect of their encounter (*Erishi* dance) which will be marked at a certain time and season to document this remarkable feat.

More so, the sacrifices of appeasement performed to usher in *Erishi* festival is also a subject in tandem with the theme of the festival, the devotion is essentially to venerate *Usuei, Okpotu* and *Igerige* as positive forces that have constantly protected the people even in turbulent times. These forces do not only represent the true yearning and aspiration of the Ase man and woman, but the true definition of their existence. The *Erishi* myth celebrates confluence of

themes and events that metamorphosed into what is today known as *Erishi* festival, these themes ranges from those of: Hatred, Anger, Frustration, Sauciness, Obsession, Arrogance, Destruction, Mischief, Dissatisfaction, Triumph and Acceptance. These themes are reflected in the mythos and in the various encounters between the water people and the fishermen, until the moment of their triumph and adornment with the ancestral headpiece in the festival performance which symbolizes the acceptance of the duo as member representatives of the water clan.

Social Functions in *Erishi* Festival

The kernel of this discussion also focuses on the social functions of *Erishi* and *Erishi* as a theatre performance, which is objectified in the performative in one sense, and what the festival is capable of achieving within the socio-cultural milieu of the people, especially as it relates to the Ase people and their worldview. According to Doki (2006) and Bakary (1972) on the functional roles of festivals, rituals, and other ceremonial types, affirms that nothing can exist for the sake of its own existence, and as such pointed out that ritual performance have their various roles they play in every society. Doki, contends that

> on a more general platform, ritual across the various cultures have certain functions they perform in the life and customs of the people (p.70).

However, Judging from the long standing history of *Erishi* festival as an agent of cultural change, it has been known to achieve the following social functions as recorded by Emiri (2010) and Agha (2023):

1. *Erishi* is essentially a pact keeping rite of the Ase people and the celebration is the only known source for the spiritual cleansing of social evil from the community.
2. The belief surrounding *Erishi* is used to achieve social cohesion and to reestablish the bond of unity among various families.
3. The festival's performance venue *isuani* which houses the shrine of a most revered deity *igerige* is used to settle grave disputes by swearing to it and at other times can be used to dispense justice by evoking its anger on an unrepentant person.
4. The celebrative power of *Erishi* festival is used to foster renewed bond of unity and social reconnect amongst kith and kin.
5. The *Mmanwu* cult a significant group underpinned with the sacred ritual performances during the festival and the *Erishi* masquerade are used to instill discipline among initiates and non-initiates and among the different age grades in the community.
6. Apart from the spiritual or sacred undertone of the *Erishi* festival it is a form of social entertainment to Ase people.
7. The *Ikpor* a prominent and fierce masquerade in the *Erishi* festival is used as machinery for community task- force especially to redeem debts legitimately owed individuals or the community.
8. The *Erishi* festival is the community's channel for venerating her deities *Usuei, Okpotu* and *Igerige* who they believe are their proponents of peace and security.
9. The *Erishi* festival is used to attract tourism
10. The *Mmanwu* cult is used for community policing and to dispense justice in the course of grave injustice. In fact, the *Mmanwu's* pronouncement is law because of its image presented to the people as the living dead.
11. The *Erishi* festival serves as a social reconstructive mechanism for communal growth and reconstruction.
12. The *Ubi* masquerade with a qualified image of a seer is a relevant agent for spiritual standardization through its prophesies relating to neglected sacrifices which plague the community.
13. The *Owhor* feared for its ruggedity is used to forcefully end the festival by fiercely knocking down anything that is standing around the performance venue with its sharp cutlass. The intention is

to remind the natives that they have long left their trades and farms unattended to, *Owho* awaken the spirit of hard work in the people.

In the above line of thought on beliefs and social functions in *Erishi* festival, Okome (2001) asserts that,

> There is strong belief in the existence of a supernatural force which is insuperable and which controls the life of the people. It is also believed that this life can be manipulated to man's advantage by making appropriate sacrifice (p. 40).

Conclusion

Erishi festival is an indigenous cultural heritage of antiquity that houses phenomena of great value that can be used to reconstruct the cultural environment of her people if exploited. For instance, the three deities (*Usuei, Okpotu & Igerige*) representing the spiritual essence of the people's world view and the definition of their universe, are forces believed to spiritually conjure high rate of fertility, bountiful harvest and exterminate evil forces within their world. Any deviation from sacrificing these small gods may spell doom for the whole community if not managed. *Erishi* masquerade and cult which serves as a relevant agent for curtailing the excesses of communal vices, and to instill high morals and discipline among erring members of the different age grades in the community is fast on its decline. This study affirms therefore, that the powers of the *Mmanwu* and other *Erishi* masquerades can be infringed upon for good, knowing that anything that can decree evil is also capable of good. These powers can be manipulated and channeled towards development to meet the needs and the challenges of recent times, especially in the areas of prosperity, peace and communal defense. But there appear to be a completely lack of scholarly research on the positive powers of these masquerades.

The *Igerige,* veteran of Ase traditional military might as it is known or called, is believed to possess an unsurpassed powers especially those that gave Ase victory at war. It is also a conceivable fact that all the esoteric war-powers of the people comes from it, considering the great conquest and the mysterious feats it pulled during their trying moments (Emiri,p.56). If this is so according to history, it then means that it could be exploited for gains especially through tourism, by erecting a cenotaph of victory in its honour instead of a mere representation with the symbolic *Orise* tree. According to the description of a native Mr. Juju Ekushe cited in Emiri (2010), *Igerige* is "unreservedly six feet nine inches tall, very dark-skinned, with three armlet band on each shoulder-arm, a red band on the forehead, with white chalk strewn across his two blood-shot eyes, in circle right to left, it hangs a gun on each shoulder" (p.157). A statue of such magnitude and magnificent description and surrounded by such an unimaginable myth could attract tourism, just like its counterparts in London, UK called Bryn Gwyn or Bendigeidfran that command great respect in the tourism industry (Emiri,2010).

The *Erishi* festival is believed to attain commendable growth and social reconstruction of its socio-cultural environment through the use of mechanisms like, *Isuani* and *Ndichie* translated to mean "village front" and the "ancestors". *Ndichie* is the god of heredity, although it is not worshipped, it is an eternal covenant (ogide-eka) between two families for the purpose of peace and unity. The bond of peace it commands is much stronger and effective than any written treaty, it is also used to settle intractable dispute by washing down with water and taken as oath calling the ancestors. *Isuani* is the location where the founding ceremony of Ase as a homogeneous entity was carried out, being the first site where the founders of Ase inhabited and also where the articles of ancestral beatification were buried. *Isuani* is indeed a sacred ground used to resolve grave disputes that are life threatening especially by swearing to it, either to prove ones innocence or never to harbour an evil thought of a perceived enemy. This has worked wonders for the people, because those who go contrary to their words after swearing to it often end up mysteriously, and this accounts for one of the key means that has been used to achieve and sustain absolute peace among the people. But most worrisome is that all of these have been abandoned completely with the advent of western orientation and practice.

Finally, following the trail of this study reveals that *Erishi* is one of the shades of African festival, whose performance content embodies certain theatrical elements similar to those peddled by the Western surmise on what constitute theatre.

Recommendation

This study recommends that *Erishi* festival should be subjected to rigorous study, while encouraging scholars of African tradition to look beyond the entertainment aspects of *Erishi* festivals, because it is capped with a lot of cultural values that can bring about socio-cultural transformation of the immediate environments of her people if exploited.

Also it is recommended that both the Local Government Authority and the Delta State Council for Arts and Culture promote the festival through adequate funding and systematic documentation, thereby facilitating further studies. The people of Ase should be encouraged to recognize that the *Erishi* Festival is a heritage which, if properly harnessed, can place them on the world cultural map.

Other relevant cultural agencies of the state should assist in publicizing and promoting the festival as a means of projecting the people's cultural identity and rich heritage.

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Symbolism in Zarma Epic Poetry

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Abstract
The epic discourse is shrouded with myth, just as it becomes a favorite ground for the griots who indulge in using rhetorical skills of all kinds in its declamation; starting from metaphor up to repetition, via symbolism to name but few. This study aims at analyzing the stylistic device of symbolism and it uses in Zarma, the second largest ethnic group in terms of number of populations after the Hausa from Niger, epic (moolo in Zarma) narratives. In fact, in the Zarma culture the griots (gesere) considered as 'speech masters' celebrate the emblematic heroes of the milieu amazingly and amusingly using figures of style. The study is based on the epic poems of an old and famous griot of this community, Kulba Baaba Seebeeri. As theoretical framework, the paper adopts 'the stylistics' before concluding that Kulba Baaba is mainly inspired by some animate and inanimate sources symbolized respectively by animals and things around the heroes in his performance.

Key words: symbol, animate, inanimate, Zarma, epic poetry

Introduction

Broadly speaking, epic is developed as a discursive and cultural practice in West Africa and in other parts of the world. In this vein, Sir Cecile Maurice Bowra (1952:3) contends that "Heroic poetry still exists in many parts of the world and has existed in many others, because it answers a real need of the human spirit." It is one of the most studied poetic genre according to Paul Zumthor (1983:103) who wrote that "Till now, the oral poetic genre studied the most as such, beyond ethnographic discourses or hazardous historical rapprochements, is epic."[1] It is performed in a specific way in Niger, especially in Zarma community where it is narrated by the griots called *gesere* or *nyamkala* who differ from the other beggars known as *ŋwaarayko* in at least three ways. First, the *gesere* praise the nobles and encourage them to have a sound behavior, especially courage, by reminding them about the exploits of their forefathers. Second, they are always linked to a chieftaincy. Third, they inherit their function from their ancestors.

In fact, these three characteristics mentioned above show that epic is never the apanage of amateurs. It is always handled by professional griots. So, the existence of epic in a given society is linked to the presence of professional griots in this society. Lilyan Kesteloot and Bassirou Dieng (2000: 51) explain that "… until otherwise proven, neither the social structures …, nor the heroism need of a people …, nor the identity function or the ideological finality … are sufficient to explain the presence or the absence of epics in a society."[2] The griots are essential in Niger.

In the Zarma culture, the class of the griots constitutes the memory of the people through the conservation and transmission of traditions and cultures of the area. They are both the historiographers and genealogists of sociocultural practices of that community. The griot of our concern here is Moumouni Sékou better known as Kulba Baaba Seebeeri. He is affiliated to the canton or chieftaincy of Seebeeri (Kouré) in the district of Kollo where recently griots were trained in schools dedicated to them at Liboré, N'dounga and Saga in Niger.

Due to the variety and richness of Kulba Baaba's repertory, we will focus our analysis in the present work on only three epics namely Gorba Dicko *moola* (The Epic of Gorba Dicko), Sumailu Gakoy

[1] « Le genre poétique oral le mieux étudié jusqu'ici en tant que tel, au-delà des relevés ethnographiques ou de hasardeux rapprochements historiques, c'est l'épopée. »

[2] « … jusqu'à preuve du contraire, ni les structures sociales…, ni l'existence des lettrés érudits…, ni le besoin d'héroïsme d'un peuple…, ni la fonction identitaire ou la finalité idéologique… ne suffisent à expliquer l'apparition ou l'absence d'épopées dans une société. »

moola (The Epic of Soumailou Gakoye) and Jika Jibrilla *moola* (The Epic of Jika Jibrilla). The aim of the study is to examine the stylistic device of symbolism and its uses in the above-mentioned epic poems. To reach our goals, we will use 'literary stylistics' that offers precious tools to analyze and understand texts, as theoretical underpinning.

We will use this approach to depict and interpret the symbols used by Kulba Baaba in his narration. The essential of the study, then, is about decoding these symbols to see what is hidden behind them and what are their significance for the hero and his society. To do so, the work goes around two main points and concludes that Kulba Baaba is mainly inspired by some animate sources symbolized by animals like the horse and the cows on one hand. On the other hand his inspiration is about inanimate sources that he symbolized by things such as the heroes' garments, saddles and arms in his epic performance.

1. Animate Symbols

By animate symbols we mean dynamic beings not static ones. Beings like trees that can move on the effect of the wind and animals that are able to walk by their own. These beings especially animals assist the epic hero in his quest journey that becomes "… a combination of a legendary tale and an air of *Moolo* to which is added the creative imagination of the griot who enriches and transforms it."[3] Hence, the importance of animals in the story of mankind is first illustrated by Allah (God) when He ordained Prophet Noah to take them with him in couples in his ship. Since then, mankind and animals become inseparable. Our oral artist, Kulba Baaba quickly understood this importance and took advantage by giving as examples cows and horses.

1.1. The inseparable companion of the epic hero: The horse

In epic poetry, the horse is the symbol of fidelity. Horses are faithful companions of heroes in epic poetry in general and in Zarma epic poetry in particular. Everywhere the hero goes, his horse is not far from him. They are inseparable. They form the best duo of the story. The complicity between the hero and his horse sometimes exceed imagination. The hero may even find from his horse consolation and compassion he could not find from his alike because according to Albert Ouedraogo (2005:61) "… the epic song was first legend; on the realities of the characters, places and certain actions, to which is grafted the imagination of poets-griots.[4] It is the case with Gorba Dicko who was assisted by his horse when he was asked to bring a living snake to make a protective charm for him,

126 Gorba Dikko tun ga karu baari	126 Gorba Dicko got up and rode his horse
127 Nda nga maabe	127 Together with his griot
128 I ka gar firsa fatta	128 They found that the snake went out
129 Hay kulu binde si	129 Suddenly
130 A ne nga maaba se a ma waasu	130 He told his griot to harry up
131 Gorba Dikko ye ga goro firsa guso boŋ	131 Gorba Dicko sat in front of the hole of the snake
132 Kala I gono kala I ga danjo funnay a ga di ga ka firsa boŋo raa	132 In a while, they saw the snake coming with the fire burning from its head
133 Kala firsa ka ga ne nga ga boŋ dooru guso raa	133 Until it came and intended to enter the hole
134 Gorba Dikko deebe ga koli boŋo ga	134 Gorba Dicko leaned and caught the head of the snake

[3] « … une combinaison d'un récit légendaire et d'un air de *Moolo* auxquels s'ajoute l'imagination créatrice du griot qui l'enrichit et la transforme. »

[4] « … le chant épique fut d'abord légende ; sur les réalités des personnages, des lieux et de certaines actions, va se greffer l'imagination des poètes-griots.

135 A binde	135 Then
136 A karu baariyo boŋ	136 He rode his horse

The horse and the griot are the supports of the hero in this dangerous phase of his quest. The danger of the scene does not prevent them to help their master as it is said popularly that 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. The difference between the griot and the horse in assisting the hero is that the griot observes the courageous deeds of the hero from a faraway point whereas the hose participates actively in the action. The horse is a true friend of the hero. Neither the horse nor the hero was afraid of the fire splitting snake. They stay firm and overcome the dangerous reptile. Moreover, when Gorba Dicko is afraid he gets inspiration from the courage of his horse. He gets afraid only three times in his life according to the story and during these scary moments the horse is around him loyally. The first time is during a stormy deep night he saves an unknown lady on his horse,

191 A ne ce fo	191 He related that the first time
192 Nga go nga baariyo boŋ	192 He was riding his horse
193 Beena hiiri	193 Then the sky threatened
194 A singi ne a singi ne	194 From right to left
195 Nga wo nga si di nga ce gna	195 He could not even see his toe
196 Bariyo hinne no ga di fonda	196 Only the horse can see the path
197 Saagi bi raa	197 In a thick bush
198 Hay kulu si a raa kala musu nda ce beeri	198 Inhabited by only lions and elephants
199 A ne cin bina din raa	199 That middle of the night
200 Nga ka ga tangi nda tuuri fo	200 He came near a tree
201 Baariyo hinne no ga di	201 Only the horse sees
202 Kala nga ma tuuro yollo raa	202 From top of the tree
203 Booro fo ne nga se barikaro ye ga ay korgo ni bariyo ga	203 A voice begged him to take it astride the horse
204 Nga na baariyo banda banda	204 That he drove the horse back
205 Nga kanda ga geeri tuuro ga	205 Till to the tree
206 Nga ne da ni ya kwara booro no	206 Told whether s/he is a person
207 Da ni ya ganji booro no	207 Or a beast
208 Ma zumbu ga karu	208 Get down and ride on the horse
209 Boora zumbu tuuro boŋ mo	209 S/he got down then
210 Kala a ka ga korgo bariyo ga a deebe ga jase kambu hinka di	210 Mount astride and took his shoulders
211 A mana zagu a ga	211 He didn't look at him/her
212 Kala a ka fu	212 Until he came home
213 A ka ga zumbu	213 He got off the unknown from the horse
214 Fu fo go	214 There was a house
215 A ne booro se a ma koy furo fu wodin raa kani hala susubay	215 He told the unknown to go and spend the night till morning

216 A koy kani	216 S/he went to sleep
217 Kala susubay	217 Till morning
218 Mo biya ga bo faada margu	218 The day breaks and the court gather
219 A ne I ma koy fuwo din raa	219 He told the courtiers to go in that house
220 Ga guna nga se booro fo si jaŋ	220 And check there may be someone inside it
221 I koy guna	221 They went and checked
222 Kala I ka ga booro gar	222 And found the person
223 Za I kwara konŋo fo no	223 It is a she-servant from their town
224 Kaŋ koy ganjo raa ga tuuri ku	224 Who went to the bush to collect woods
225 Hari hawo na a darandi	225 The storm disoriented her
226 A koy karu tuuro din boŋ	226 She went to climb that tree
227 A ne I ma a ce nga se	227 Gorba Dicko ordered them to call her
228 I na a ce a se	228 They called her
229 A ne to	229 He said that
230 Waato kaŋ ga	230 At the moment
231 Nga na bariyo banda banda	231 He drove the horse back
232 Ga kande ga geeri tuuro ga ga ne a ma karu	232 To bring near the tree and ask her to get on
233 Kaŋ a karu	233 When she got on
234 Cimi no	234 That's true
235 Kaŋ a deebe ga nga jasa di	235 When she leaned and caught his shoulders
236 Nga wo mana zagu a ga	236 He didn't turn to look at her
237 A ne no dini	237 So, that day
238 A ne nga humburu	238 He got scare
239 Amma nga kwaayi hinka kaŋ go nga ginde ga mana bay	239 But nobody realized that, even the garments he was wearing

Both the second and the third times Gorba Dicko gets afraid, the horse still there with him ready to help. Furthermore, when Gorba Dicko defeats all his enemies he turns in a warrior who do not need to fight to win battles. His presence is sufficient for the opposite champ to surrender and offer the cattle of the village as ransom. Now, Gorba Dicko who was born with only one cow as heritage cannot count the number of his cows.

1.2. Cows: sign of wealth

Cattles in general, cows particularly represent the symbol of wealth in Zarma society. The number of cows you possess, the richer you are. If you do not have any cow at your possession then you are classified among the poorest of the society. The Zarma epic hero's bravery is measured by the number of cattle he brought back from his expedition. Mostly, at young age heroes do not have many cows. They gain them the more they grow and the more they become skillful. For instance, at his birth, Gorba Dicko has only one cow,

10 Hana kaŋ hane I na Gorba Dikko hay	10 The day Gorba Dicko was born
11 Kaŋ baabo ka ga bu	11 On that day his father died

12 A mana bu ga hay kulu naŋ a se	12 He left nothing as legacy to him
13 Nganda gnaŋo se	13 To him and his mother
14 Kala haw gna folloŋ	14 Except one cow
15 Haw gnaŋo din	15 From which
16 Nga no gnaŋo ga koy gaa	16 His mother would go to the encampment
17 Ga waa ta ga kande nga no Gorba Dikko ga haŋ	17 To fetch its milk for Gorba Dicko to drink

The sustenance of the young Gorba Dicko is guaranteed by this only cow his father left for him and his widow mother. Apart from that cow, Gorba Dicko's family has no other means of subsistence. Gorba Dicko's family, then, is one of the poor families if not the poorest one of the villages around. Unfortunately, Dicko killed the cow to satisfy his fellow young mates and locusts and mice hunters on a day they found nothing in their hunting party. The young hero would prefer to lose his unique cow than seeing his companions going back home emptied belies and empty hands. Let us read Kulba Baaba on this issue,

19 Hala Gorba Dikko ka ga caram	19 Till Gorba Dicko grew up
20 Hala zanka kulu ye Gorba Dikko banda	20 Till all his age mates were behind him
21 I ga ngey hangawiyaw yaŋ te ga koy ganjo raa	21 At that time, they made small bows and went to the bush
22 Ga ngey doyaŋ fo	22 To hunt some locusts
23 Da ngey canyaŋ	23 And mice
24 Hana fo I koy ganjo raa I mana du hay fo	24 On a day they went to the bush and found nothing
25 A ne zankey ma nga dum	25 He asked his comrades to accompany him
26 Gaa do	26 To the encampment
27 Zankey na a gana kala I koy gaa	27 They followed him until the encampment
28 A ne fulaŋey se maŋ ngey hawo	28 He asked the Fulani where their cow was
29 I ne araŋ hawo ne	29 They showed him their cow
30 Gorba Dikko ne I ma hawo di	30 Gorba Dicko ordered to catch the cow
31 I na hawo di	31 They caught the cow
32 I na hawo zeeri a ne I ma wi	32 He asked them to strike the cow down and kill it
33 I na wi	33 They killed cow
34 A ne zankey se booro kaŋ ga dumbu ga ton	34 He said to the kids: "Whoever wants to cut and roast
35 Ma dumbu ga ton	35 May do so
36 Boooro kaŋ ga dumbu ga konda ni gna ma hina ni se	36 Whosoever wanted to cut and bring to his mother to cook
37 Ma dumbu ga konda ni gna ma hina ni se	37 May cut and bring to his mother as well"
38 A ne laami day ga kande doo hayyaŋ nda can	38 It is only desire that leads to hunt locusts and mice

Sometimes we must sacrifice the better things we have in order to get the best ones. In the gesture of Dicko, we have the notion of self-sacrifice. Till young Dicko shows that he is not selfish, he does not defend his own interest. No, he privileges the common interest instead. And this brings him to higher degrees later on when he becomes mature. He is able to bring back not only cows but herds of animals the village cannot hold. Let us again follow carefully Kulbaa Baaba in this long passage of the story,

58 Hana fo binde i na wangu ka	58 One day warriors of his village went out to fight
59 I na wangu kaa	59 They went to fight
60 Gorba Dikko tunu ga dake I ga	60 Gorba Dicko followed them on foot
61 A ga I hansi gana	61 He followed them at a distance
62 A ga I hansi gana	62 He followed them at a distance
63 Kala wango koy to kwara fo do	63 Until the troops reached a village
64 I na kwara hawo kulu di	64 They caught all the cows of this village
65 I ye ga bare nda hawo	65 They drove the cows towards home
66 Gorba Dikko ye ga dake I ga	66 Gorba Dicko still followed them
67 A ye ga dake I ga	67 He followed them
68 A ye ga dake I ga	68 He followed them
69 Kala a gono	69 Suddenly
70 Kwara boorey kaŋ hawo I koy sambu	70 The villagers whose cows was caught
71 Kala I go ngey hawey laawal raa	71 Traced back their cows
72 Kala Gorba Dikko mo ka ga fatta I ga	72 Then Gorba Dicko appears
73 I ne a se iri booro wala booro waani	73 They asked him: “Friend or foe?”
74 A ne araŋ booro no	74 He answered: “Friend”
75 Gorba Dikko na I gana	75 Gorba Dicko followed them
76 Kala kala kala I koy to ngey hawey	76 Until they came to their cows
77 I na ngey hawey zumandi	77 They took back their cows
78 Gorba Dikko yaŋ kwara boorey ga	78 From the people of Gorba Dicko’s village
79 I na hawey boy ga ye	79 They drove back their cows towards home
80 Gorba Dikko ye ga dake I ga	80 Gorba Dicko followed them again
81 Kala I koy to sajo raa	81 Until they came to the bush
82 A ne wango se	82 He threatened the troops
83 Booro kulu ka dake hawey din ga	83 That whosoever followed those cows
84 Kulu boora ga nga teeli taamu	84 Would dig his own grave
85 I ne kociyo maŋ no iri ga ni bay	85 They said: “Young man where did we know you?
86 Iri haw kaŋ wangu za iri koy ta	86 Our cows caught by troops that we took back
87 Nga no ni ga ne booro kaŋ dake hawey ga	87 That you say whosoever followed them
88 Boora ga nga teeli taamu	88 Would dig his own grave
89 Maŋ iri di nin ce fo	89 Have we ever meet you once?

90 A ne to hawey no ya	90 He says: "Well here are the cows"
91 Sohadin	91 Suddenly
92 I na baari za ka furo Gorba Dikko boŋ	92 One warrior attacked Gorba Dicko
93 A na boora din hay ga ka baariyo boŋ	93 Gorba Dicko knocked him down
94 A ye a baariyo boŋ	94 And mounted his horse
95 Ay me cino a kaŋ i raa	95 Presently, he attacked the troop
96 Kaatiyaŋ folloŋ a na I ka hawey raa	96 In a few moments he took the troop out of the cows
97 A na hawey boy ga bare	97 He drove back the cows
98 Kala a kandey fu	98 Till he brought them home
99 A ka ga I kayandi kwara banda	99 He stationed them at the entrance of the village
100 A ma ne nooro wo min jay baali wo min jay	100 He would say: "nooro wo min jay baali wo min jay"[5]
101 Ni ma wala	101 Do you hear?
102 A ne gnaŋo se a ma tun ga za gaaso ga koy gaa	102 He told his mother to take the calabash and go to the cattle
103 Ay ne ni se Irkoy hinne no ga fundi ka a ma fun	103 I told you that it is only by the permission of God that a soul die
104 Irkoy ga baranda manci booro ga baranda	104 God possesses everything not mankind
105 Handin	105 From that day
106 Nga no Gorba Dikko ye beene kaŋ a mana zumbu	106 Gorba Dicko ascends to glory and never comes down anymore
107 Kaŋ Gorba Dikko no ya	107 Gorba Dicko ascends to warrior glory
108 Hala nga no ya	108 He continuously ascends to glory
109 Hala nga no ya	109 He continuously ascends to glory

It is noticeable in the above passage that the term cow is repeated at least ten times. This repetition is not done at random. The oral artist uses it for specific purpose. It has both pedagogical and didactical meanings in the sense that it teaches the audience the place and importance of this animal in the Zarma community. The artist focuses on repeating this word cow because: "… repetition does have more specific stylistic values …. One is giving a certain amount of emphasis to a point that needs to be stressed, …" (Okpewho 1992:71) Beyond the pedagogic and didactic values the repetition of the same word adds an aesthetic characteristic to the text. It gives it a touch of beauty or attractiveness. It provides certain sing-song melodies - and Belcher (1999: xix) supports that "singing provide the entertainment for the occasion.", to the text of Kulba Baaba who is not only inspired by animate things only but also with inanimate ones.

2. Inanimate Symbols

By inanimate symbols we refer to things that are neither capable to move nor able to walk. They are static not dynamic. They need intervention from mankind to serve. These elements are used in the performance of Kulba Baaba as sources of his inspiration. He frequently mentions the hero's arm, the saddle and even his garments.

[5] Fulani language meaning: that … is mine, that ram is mine.

2.1. The hero's garments and saddle: courage metaphorized

In Zarma culture, *the toubal*[6] announces the gathering of war events. In fact, as soon as the *toubal* is bitten, nobody asks himself what is going on. You just wear your war garments and respond to the call. The sound of this big drum is largely sufficient to tell everybody that they are attacked or are about to go to the battle field for new conquests. So, the *toubal* is one of the symbols of war symbols in Zarma culture. The horse, we talked about in the first point, is also a symbol of war apart from being symbol of loyalty. For this reason, before colonization, at least each family in Zarma villages has its own horse. For the same reason the Zarma epic hero is always with his horse.

Besides the *toubal* and the horse, some specific types of clothes and the saddle of the hero also symbolized war in the Zarma society. For clothes, it is the case of the Chief's '*kwayi bi'*[7]. In case of extreme emergencies, there is no time to beat the *toubal*, the reference is the *kwayi bi* of the Chief. The warriors will recognize and just follow their leader without any question for his garments told them what they want to know. The *kwayi bi* indicates the seriousness of the situation. So, in Zarma epic poems, if the hero wears his *kwayi bi* it is synonym of combat.

Furthermore, what is so extraordinary with the epic hero is that once he puts his *kwayi bi* he is going to fight with or without a supportive friend. He is going to fight alone against the opposite troops whatsoever their number as "… battles, duels and other violent conflicts are truly typical of the epic...."[8] The next step after the *kwayi bi* wearing is the saddling of the horse. After that the hero will mount and take the path to the battle field. A good example is given by Kulbba Baaba in the epic of Sumailu Gakoye in the following lines:

421 A haamay ga furo fuwo raa	421 He propelled himself into the house,
422 A na bari gina kulu sambu ga fatta ce folloŋ	422 And picked up the entire harness, all at once
423 Kaŋ a na karikey dake	423 When he put the saddle pad on the horse's back
424 Kaŋ a na gaaro dake bariyo boŋ	424 That he put down the saddle itself,
425 Ga deebe ga kuna habirijo totolo di ga a candi	425 That he extended his arms to take and draw the reins,
426 Ka me nama ga a cindi bariyo ce gina hinka kulu go beene ga kay	426 That he bit his lip to pull the strap, the two front legs of the horse were upright.

"The legs of the horse were upright" ready to transport Gakoye wherever he wants to go in his quest for according to Renard (1985:182), "Heroes almost always go to a *far-off land, …"*. (Italics in the original) In this quest journey the hero brings with him any kind of arms, mostly the spear.

2.2. The hero's spear: death incarnated

The spear of the hero incarnate death in Zarma epic poetry. All the heroes of Kulba Baaba namely Gorba Dicko, Jika Jibrilla and Sumailu Gakoye do have a spear. It is used during dire combat but sometime, even its first exposition can make victims. An example is when Jika unties his spear contained in a soft but dangerous bundle of rags. People do not know it is a spear in the rags bundle. When Jika starts to remove the rags around it, everything is fine till the moment the spear is clearly apparent,

[6] A big drum
[7] Black clothes
[8] « … ce sont les batailles, duels et autres conflits violents, qui sont véritablement typiques de l'épopée... » (Seydou 1983 :35)

378 Kala kala kala a na zarazara feeri	378 Till till till he opened the rag completely
379 Ga ka takuba ga ga baŋ	379 And took the sword from it
380 A ka gar wura muusu boŋ	380 Whereas it is a golden lion head
381 Nga no a soogu	381 That he melted
382 A ga no a na takuba didigi	382 He covered the sword with it
383 Kala a to takuba boŋ ga	383 Till he reached the head of the sword
384 A hanse ka takuba boŋo di	384 He grasped the head of the sword very well
385 Day a na a taŋ boorey game raa	385 Then he let it in between people
386 Takuba sallanta	386 The fact that the sword redressed
387 Booro hinka go ga furu I kulu boŋey fun	387 Two person are lying without head
388 Wirrr boorey feeri a ga	388 Suddenly people left him

There is no combat, yet. It is the only fact of redressing the spear that kills two persons. The sword by its own without any manipulation from its owner makes two victims, how if it is used by the hero himself? The answer is that the victims are uncountable when the spear is used by the main character. It is like a natural catastrophe. For instance, the action of the spear of Sumailu gakoye on his opponents is compared to that of bush fire on dry grass.

701 Wango ka ga fatta	701 When the enemy army was in sight
702 Waato ga nga mo ye Bara boŋ	702 Sumailu Gakoye got back on the saddle of Bara.
703 Nango kaŋ a na Bara za ga daŋ I raa din	703 The side he started with
704 Danga waati kaŋ yaara du subu koogo	704 It was like a bush fire on dry grass.
705 A na laawal wo din saatu a Konda	705 He made a wide gap
706 A ye ga a daŋ koine	706 And then returned the opposite way back.
707 A na no din saatu	707 He pushed his horse again and scoured a new side.

As on its way in, the spear makes the same or similar havoc on its way back. It provokes many victims drenched in blood everywhere on its passage. Corpse are piled up there. A true hinge. Furthermore, on other occasion the hero uses arm like stick made with iron. An illustration is given by our oral artist in the epic of Gorba Dicko during his encounter with a supernatural being he was challenged to kill in order to show that he is really courageous. It is a spirit living around a magical *Hasu* tree

362 Kala a di ginno boŋo ku nda haso	362 He realized that the spirit is even longer than the tree
363 A na guwo haabu	363 He rushed the stallion
364 Guru goobu go ga dake jasa ga	364 He had his stick of iron on his shoulder
365 Kala a ka ga to haso do	365 Until he came to the *Hasu* tree
366 A na guwo kurru no din	366 He rode the stallion there
367 A na takuba daŋ ga haso nda ginno labu	367 He hooked the spirit and the tree together

There is no time for Dicko to make the difference between the tree and the devil living in it. He strikes both the tree and the demon at the same time to make sure he has killed the later. To do so; the iron stick is a very good means. Dicko returns home victorious over the spirit.

Conclusion

In sum, Zarma epic poetry is full of symbols. This paper has analyzed only some animate and inanimate symbols exposed by Kulba Baaba Seebeeri. On one hand, he focuses his performance on animals like the horse and the cow to show his genius. The analysis demonstrates that the horse is the symbol of fidelity whereas the cow symbolizes wealth. On the other hand, examples of special garments, saddles and spears are given as inanimate symbols of things. The garments and saddles are symbols of war and courage while spears represent death and mourning.

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