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**PATRIARCHAL IDEOLOGY AND ITS EFFECT ON IGBO NATION: A STUDY OF  
NWOKELEUE'S *UGOCHINYERE NWATA***

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**Abstract**

*This paper investigated and analyzed the female oppression in Igbo novel, using survey research method. The study examined various ways in which patriarchy and female exploitation are meted on women in Igbo novel. This research adopted the theory of feminism, which describes, interprets and re-interprets women's experience as depicted in the Igbo novel, and male interpretation in literature. At the end of the study, it was observed that in Igbo nation, feminism and traditionalism stand in opposition. Women are assumed to be relegated to the background and no prominent role is accorded them; despite their roles in the community through some traditional institutions like Umuada (daughters of a clan) and Iyomdi (wives of a clan). The paper concluded that patriarchy can lead to poor development of Africa and Igbo nation. It can also affect women psychologically and limit their potentials. The study recommended that women should be given equal right as men in Igboland. Since culture is dynamic; certain traditions against women can be redress.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Patriarchy is the society that is controlled by men. It is a society whereby power and importance are given only to men. Men believe that women lack critical minds, that they are weak, inferior and must be under men. Igbo culture portrays women as inferior and subordinate to men, and such are carefully and consciously built in their language, oral and written literature which are used over generations. According to Ohaeto (2013:22), "The male gender shapes language to portray them as powerful and independent and warrants them to form and direct their stance and reality of life against female gender. The same expressions were formed to depreciate women gender; they are less significant than their male counterparts". This shows that some women feel inadequate, afraid and powerless even in matters concerning them as a result of attitude of men towards women. However, this research intends to explore how male writers of African literature especially Igbo literary writers encourage the marginalization and abuse of women in their works. In most of the literary works written by male, female characters are marginalized, suppressed, humiliated and stereotyped. Odinye and Okey-Umeh(2016:79) says "the ideal female character created by male writers works within the framework of her traditional roles as a wife and a mother. These constructed roles are accepted social values which the female gender must aptly adapt to in order to earn love from her husband". This means that many of the works written by male writers showcase injustice and inequalities against women which manifest inform of male ego supported by patriarchal society as seen in Nwokelue's work.

Women are forcefully made by males to become their own oppressors. When a married man dies, his widow or widows are subjected to torture, cruel and inhuman treatment by the husband's family. The Igbo custom expects the widow to mourn the husband for one year, within that one year, she is expected

not to take part in social activities. Orabueze and Ogbazi (2013:14) say “immediately her husband’s corpse is lowered into the grave, women lead her into the house, where her head is scraped clean of any strand of hair like a criminal in prison custody”. This widowhood practice is only for female and not for male. Inequalities, injustice and supremacy meted on women show that men enjoy patriarchal society; and will not fail to project male dominance even in literary works written by male.

### **Igbo Nation**

A nation is a country considered as a group of people with the same language, culture and history. According to Hornby (2020 : 1036) “a nation is a group of people who live in a particular area under one government”. Igbo nation is a group of people with the same language, culture and history. It occupies the eastern parts of Nigeria. It comprises of five states- Abia state, Anambra state, Ebonyi state, Enugu state and Imo. Igbo language is their mother tongue and they have English language as their second language. Orabueze and Ogbazi (2013:2) state that, “pre-colonial Igbo nation operated a republican society, which was guided by customs that are accepted as legal requirement or obligatory rules of conduct”. This means that they are beliefs which Igbo people regarded as their law; which people must obey, whoever fails to obey such law will be sanctioned. The law of Igbo people is their culture.

Culture simply means a way of life. It embodies the attitude of people from the present to the future. Culture includes everything we think, do and have as members of a society. Therefore, it includes the ideas, values, beliefs, religion, philosophy of the people and literature. It includes the rules by which people guide their behavior and material objects that are found among them. Igbokwe (2014: 332) defines culture as man’s entire social heritage, all the knowledge, belief, customs, and skill he acquired as a member of a society”. This means that culture is used with the reference to the society. It does not die with the death of an individual or group of individuals. Culture provides homework for the social arrangements that govern daily life. Every age, expands its own existing artistic language, or invents a new one appropriate to its view of reality. Culture can be classified into material and non-material culture. Nebo (2014: 352) notes that, “material aspects of culture are the types of houses we live in, manner of dressing, the musical instrument being used, the food we eat, the cherished art works, the means of transportation, the type of hair style and so on. While the non-material aspects of culture refer to the intangible values and norms of the community such as the respect for the elders, social relationships, law(custom), mode of greeting, languages, ways of showing hospitality, religion and so on”. This means that other intangible values are women disinheritance, widowhood practice, women not participating in their bride price negotiation, women to be given kola by men when women are in the mist of the men. All these cultures are made by man. Culture are man-made, they are designs, prescriptions and responses, which are deliberately fashioned to guide all aspects of people’s life. Africans especially Igbos have culture by which they are known all over the world. According to Okodo (2013: 204) “since culture is the way of life, there is no doubt that Africans have the psyche. As a result, their environment tackles their thinking faculties. So each time they are at work, their culture takes upper hand in determining the nature of their output”. This means that the culture of the people affects the people of that particular culture. Igbo literary writers always showcase Igbo culture in their literary works such authors are Ubesie, Onyekaonwu, Ofomata, Nwadike, Nwokelue and so on. This is because Igbo authors are part of the Igbo culture and cannot be separated from Igbo culture even in their literary works.

### **Relationship Between Culture and Literature**

Culture has a long standing relationship with literature. The issues that are reflected by the modern African writers are issues in culture. Literature depends on society from where it draws its materials. Culture and the behavior of people are part of the society. Literature finds culture a significant source of its materials. It interprets and re-interpret culture. According to Obuh in Oche and Njoku (2012:71) “for literature to prove its usefulness, it delves into history (culture) for subject matter, afterall history (culture) cannot be divorced from its society and literature does not exist in vacuum”. This means that literature and history (culture) are both products of the society and therefore, their inter-dependability is not impossible. Literature derives its theme from culture. Theme of a work of literature is its central or dominant idea. It is the main idea in a talk, piece of writing or work of art. Kirszner and Mandel (2004:3) assert that, “theme is conveyed through the selection and arrangement of detail, through the emphasis of certain words, events or images and through the actions and reaction of character”. Some themes in literary works are injustice against women, women as character dependent creatures. This means that the assumptions, concerns, values, ideas and belief of a particular country, society, of a particular group

within that society can help to determine the themes authors choose to explore and the manner in which they do so. Theme is the central idea or issue that the writer contemplates or explores in the story. Brereton (2008:57) notes that, “a good story can have more than one theme”. This means that a literary work can have more than one theme”. For instance, in Nwokelue’s *Ugochinyere Nwata*, it has more than one theme; theme of patriarchy, theme of bad leadership, theme of jealousy, theme of negligence for women e.tc. Most male authors choose their themes from Igbo culture which they explore in Igbo literature. Some of the themes include: stereotype against women, injustice, women as dilate and dependent creatures etc. These are culture oriented. The male writers are part of the patriarchal society that is why they encourage marginalization and abuse of women which they reflect, through the female characters they create within the framework of their cultural roles as wives and mothers. This shows that culture and literature are inter-mingled and cannot be separated from each other.

### **Feminist Theory**

The history of feminist could be traced to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the agitation for gender equality began. However, there is strong indication that early incidents abound that triggered thoughts of redress in the feminist mind. This research deals with stereotyped, inheritance from husband and father’s property. The traditional religion places some taboos and beliefs against women. Feminism came in the wake of inequality, being melted out to women over the history. This practice kept festering until it metamorphosed in the activity called feminism. According to Aharanwa (2013:140-141) “the religious practices continue through the classical period to contemporary times when it spawned enough sentiments that brought in conference being held to instigate governments to come up with policies against anti women practices”. Feminist theory looks into the long-standing dominance of male, patriarchal ideologies which add up to a kind of male conspiracy and patriarchal attitude against women. Cudon (2013:273) says, “feminism is an attempt to describe, interpret and reinterpret women experience as depicted in various kinds of literature especially the novel and to a lesser extent, poetry and drama” .

Feminism questions notions of value in literature and also privileging women writers. It challenges religious, traditional practices and accepted male ideas, about the nature of women and about how women feel, act and think and how in general they respond to life and living. It questions numerous assumptions about women made by the male writers, not least any tendency to cast women in stock character.

Feminist theory believes that culture has been so completely dominated by men, that literature is full of unexamined male produced assumption. They correct this imbalance by analyzing and combating patriarchal attitude. Kennndy and Gioia (2007:1526) say that “feminist carefully examines how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality”. This means that feminist explores how author’s gender influence consciously and unconsciously his or her writing. They analyze how sexual identity influences the reader or a text. They are also concerned with the exploitation and manipulation of female audience. According to Oguche and Abosode (2017:17) “African writers especially Igbo literatures over the years have been attempting, with the carrying degrees of accuracy, to capture the vulnerability of the women in the face of the dwindling state”. In this research, the term patriarchy is stated with the preview of gender violence perpetrated against women. In other words, this paper will contextualize patriarchy as a susceptibility of women occasioned by the continued dehumanization, devaluation and denial of her right and womanhood in the Igbo Nation.

### **Analysis of the Novel *Ugochinyere Nwata***

Set in Igbo land, the novel deals with patriarchy, a society controlled by men. The author utilizes characters as a major devise to comment on violence, intolerance, bad governance and the world which men believes that belong to them. His characters are representatives of the classes of people in Igbo nation; the female, male and villagers. He uses them to show how patriarchal ideology influences people’s decisions and actions.

The story revolves around the rich family of EzeIkpeaku whose leadership is in their lineage. EzeIkpeaku after married for many years without a son, his brother Udenkwo insisted that he must marry a second wife. He married Nnenkwo as his second wife while Ekemma was his first wife. Few weeks after Nnenkwo arrival into the family, Ekemma became pregnant and gave birth to a son named Obiefula. Later, Nnenkwo gave birth to her own son called Akuoma.

When EzeIkpeaku died, Obiefula was 21 years old, after the funeral ceremony of EzeIkpeaku, the Eze’s cabinet decided to crown Obiefula. Nnenkwo knowing too well what the Eze’s cabinet was about to do,

arranged assassins to kill Obiefula. Obiefula was kidnapped a day to his kingship. Assassins took him to the forest, shooting him many times thinking that he was dead. The Eze's cabinet consulted a chief priest, Akirika to know what happened to Obiefula, but Akirika lied against Obiefula because Nnenkwo and EzeOnyido bribed him. Akirika said that Obiefula is an Ogbanje (water spirit) that nobody will see him again, that they should crown Nnenkwo's son Akuoma Eze (king). Obiefula was not dead, when his assassins shot him many times, thinking that he was dead, he was saved by a palm wine tapper called Ezeala, who came to check on his wine in the morning, and saw Obiefula lying almost lifeless. He listened to the heart beat and saw that he is still alive. Ezeala specialized in traditional medicine, he removed the bullets infested in Obiefula and gradually Obiefula became well.

In Akuoma's leadership, people cried over their condition and unending suffering, marginalization meted out on them by Akuoma. He made laws, that any woman who gave birth on Afo market day, that the child belongs to him. People criticized EzeAkuoma and his administration including a chief priest called Akataka. This chief priest called Akataka told him the secret behind Obiefula disappearance and how Akirika lied that Obiefula is a water spirit.

Obiefula began to disturb his master Ezeala that he wants to go home, Ezeala refused but later allowed him to go. On reaching his father's compound, EzeAkuoma saw him and died. People gathered, when Obiefula narrates to them what happened to him and the part Nnenkwo played, they were all astonished. Obiefula was later made the Eze (king) of Isuoha and peace returned to the community.

### **Examining Patriarchy In *Ugochinyere Nwata***

**Negligence of women-** *Ugochinyere Nwata* reveals how enslaved and insecure the women has become. In this novel, the author failed to mention the names of the EzeIkpeaku's daughters. But the incidents in the novel reveal that there are daughters in the family. EzeIkpeaku was regarded as being childless because of absence of a son who will take over from him when he died. His younger brother Udenwa said to him;

Otu ubochi, Udenwa kporo nwanne ya nwoke bu Eze  
Ikpeaku rioro ya ka o ga luta nwananyi ozoro ga-amutara ya nwa  
Nwoke. Ka o ga-abu a chororo nwoke a hughu ka o nwee onye  
ga-anochi anya ya.(p.4)

(One day, Udenwa called his brother EzeIkpeaku and appeal to him  
to marry another wife, that will bear a son for him who  
will replace him when he dies.) (p.4)

The action of EzeIkpeaku and his brother Udenwa which they hide under the cloak of tradition and culture shows clear indication of abandonment, evil and injustice against women. Regarding EzeIkpeaku as being childless, while there are female children in the family shows their preference for a male child.

**Leadership is only for men-** In *Ugochinyere Nwata*, when EzeIkpeaku died and Obiefula was kidnapped, Eze's seat was vacant. In feminist theory, Ekemma or her first daughter are to be crowned Eze (king) but due to tradition, for women to be Eze (king) is unacceptable in Igboland. Therefore, feminism and tradition are oppose to one another. For this reason, Isuoha people were without Eze for many years.

Ike gwuru ndi Ojiala niile na ha amaghikwa ihe ha ga-  
Emezi, iji hu na ogbakoro gawara n'ihu. Maka na isi a huru  
Kwawa okpu anochi ya, ha lekatara onwe ha anya. Maazi  
Okonkwo wee bilie gwa ndi obodo ka ha lasaa.(p.26)

(The Eze cabinets (Ojiala) were disappointed, they did not  
know what to do, Obiefula who is the bone of contention  
was not present. Maazi Okonkwo decided to dismiss the  
meeting and everyone departed.) (p.26)

### **Effects of Patriarchy on Igbo Nation**

**Assassination:** Assassination is the murder of an important or famous person especially for political reasons. Patriarchy can lead to assassination. This could happen when there is an only son in the family. Out of jealousy people like co-wives, kinsmen, Eze cabinet can assassinate the male child as one can see in *Ugochinyere Nwata*. Nnenkwo says,

Achoro m ka unu gbuo nwata a si na aha ya bu Obiefula.  
achoro m ka o lakwuwe nna ya nwuru anwu. Achoro m ka nwa m

bụ Akuoma bụrụ Eze obodo anyị makana ọha obodo lee anya Obiefula a hughị, ị mara na ọ bụ nwa m nwoke Akuoma ga-abụ Eze. (p.19)

(Nnenkwo told the assassins, I want you to kill Obiefula. I want Him to join his late father EzeIkpeaku in the spirit world. Once Obiefula is dead, the villagers do not have option than to crown my son AkuomaEze (p.19)

Patriarchy heighten the level of assassination in Igbo nation. In Igbo land, the traditional rulers, Eze, Igwe can kidnap, assassinate and destroy anyone they considered as a rivalry to the throne. This can lead to backwardness in Igbo nation.

**Bad leadership-** This is the inability to be sensitive to the plight of the people. Males hide under culture to make laws that are only beneficial to them. In *Ugochinyere Nwata*, Akuoma made laws against women, he says;

Nwaanyi ọbụla mụrụ nwa ụbọchi Afo anaghizi enwe anụrị n'ihina Eze nwe obodo ga-eduru nwa ahụ dika o tiri n'iwu. (p.69)  
(Any woman who is delivered of a baby on Afo market day is always sad because, that child will automatically belong to EzeAkuoma as he instructed.) (p.69)

In Igbo nation, there are many laws against women. Women are seen as inferior and lack critical mind to rule. Women are seen as subordinate to men. For this reason, it is an abomination for women to be Eze or Igwe in Igbo traditional society. These assumptions about women are not natural for they are made by male. And this can affect the development of the Igbo nation.

#### **The Image of Women In *Ugochinyere Nwata*.**

Maazi R.M Nwokelue is an Igbo man who always showcases the patriarchal ideologies accumulated in Igbo Tradition. In his novel *Ugochinyere Nwata*, he sees women as the following;

#### **Women are Responsible for Inability to Bear a Male Child in the Family.**

In *Ugochinyere Nwata*, EzeIkpeaku was advised to marry another wife because his first wife Ekemma was unable to give birth to a male child.

Otu ụbọchi, Udenwa kpọrọ nwanne ya nwoke bụ Eze Ikpeaku rịọ ya ka ọ ga lụta nwanyị ọzọ ga-amutara ya nwa Nwoke.(p.4)  
(One day, Udenwa called his brother and appeal to him to marry another wife, that will bear for him a son.) (p.4)

#### **Women as an Enemies to a Fellow Women**

In *Ugochinyere Nwata*, Nnenkwo, EzeIkpeaku's second wife fought Ekemma her co-wife, by trying to kill Obiefula, so that her son Akuoma can become Eze Isuoha.

Achọrọ m ka unu gbuo nwata a si na aha ya bụ Obiefula. Achọrọ m ka ọ lakwuwe nna ya nwurū anwū (Nnenkwo told the assassins, I want you to kill Obiefula. I want him to join his late father EzeIkpeaku in the spirit world. (p.19)

#### **Women as Evil**

In this novel, when EzeIkpeaku was alive. He called his cabinets to inform them that Obiefula will take over his throne when he dies. Nnenkwo was in her room listening to what EzeIkpeaku said. She became angry, jealous and hated Obiefula to the point of hiring thugs to kill him.

Nnenkwo nọ n'ime ụlọ na-egenti n'ihe niile ha na-ekwu. N' eziokwu, ihe ahụ ha na-ekwu adighi ya obi mma. (p.7)  
(Nnenkwo was in her room eavesdropping to what Eze Ikpeaku was saying, actually she was not happy with what was being said.)

Furthermore, Nwokelue in his book *Ugochinyere Nwata*, presents Nnenkwo as a type of woman who is morally ill, from being jealous of Obiefula to assassinating him, and having extra-marital affairs with

Ezeonyido. He presents Ekemma as a woman who is always afraid of rejection and cannot express how she feels.

### **Recommendation**

The researchers suggest that women should be given leadership opportunities as men in Igbo nation. Certain culture and tradition made against women can be redress. The Igbo literary artists should keep Igbo culture and tradition aside when interpreting literature. Bringing tradition in their literary works can promote patriarchy.

### **Conclusion**

This study has thrown more light on the age long situation of women in the traditional Igbo society. Culture and tradition nourish the literary authors' imagination which they tried to portray in literature. In literature, women are disadvantaged over their male counterparts. In *Ugochinyere Nwata*, there were females in the family of Ezelkpeaku; his two wives and daughters, yet Ezelkpeaku was referred to as being childless because of the absence of a male child. The researchers, therefore, conclude that patriarchy are inhuman practices and can lead to poor development of the Igbo nation in particular and Nigeria in general.

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