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Editor's Preface

Gender inequality and emancipation are not perceived in “Journal of Gender and Power” in isolated domains of social life. They are analysed and interpreted as an integral part of society in their mutual and often very complicated relations. Moreover, there may be contradictory explanations of the dynamic of gender discourses. A particular phenomenon which can be understood from one point of view as a space of gender marginalisation, from another one, can be seen as quite emancipatory (a good example is here the commercialised native art).

Also, it is necessary to stress that gender incapacitation is never total, and the imposition of a dominating ideology is never entirely successful. Subordination is never “completed”. In the spheres belonging to the superior social group, there are always spaces of resistance and freedom. Subordinated create and practice spaces of meaningful thoughts and practices which are not restricted by the assumptions of any master narrative. One of the magnificent ways of preserving freedom and expressing resistance is through art. It can take the form of art creation by members of subordinated groups or even silent but still very thoughtful participation in art. However, what is most crucial is that resistance can be exercised in small acts of everyday life. Gender relations are never closed in a rigid matrix of meanings.

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik
Editor-in-Chief



ARTICLES





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Multimedia Showcase – International Expressions of Kindness

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Supporting Youth in Ukraine During the Russian Invasion

ABSTRACT. During the Russian invasion, hundreds of children in Ukraine have been supported by people around the world in unique ways. Creative strategies have been employed to continue school experiences as well as mentoring opportunities and acts of kindness. This paper will describe how virtual teaching has sustained the educational levels of many of the children who stayed in Ukraine during the war as well as the how the involvement of youth from around the world demonstrated support of the children who have endured the invasion of their country.

KEYWORDS: children, war, Ukraine, support

Introduction

During the spring of 2022, two projects began with the intent of supporting boys and girls as well as teens still in Ukraine during the Russian invasion. Both projects continue to be active as the war rages on. They exemplify the desire of people from around the world to support those in need and to especially offer opportunities to continue to keep life as normal as possible for those enduring war.

One project involved 18 teachers from the United States who volunteered to support students who remained in Ukraine. Over 100 students have been taught since July of 2022 using creative virtual methods from these teachers since most of the students involved did not have access to school.

In addition, a group of 19 students from around the world became a part of the Teen Advisory Board for the Multimedia Showcase called International Expressions of Kindness which created opportunities for kids from any country to show their support for the youth still in Ukraine during the war.

These methods of supporting boys and girls in Ukraine have ensured that they know they are not forgotten and that the world is constantly working to support them. These two projects will be detailed in this manuscript to highlight the support for people around the world.

Effects of the Russian invasion on Ukraine

As of January 2023, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) reported more than 7,000 deaths of Ukrainian civilians. Most Ukrainian men have stayed in the country to fight against this invasion which has divided almost all Ukrainian families. Millions of Ukrainians have fled to other countries which has resulted in a major humanitarian crisis. Poland reportedly admitted about 8.9 million refugees and has accepted larger numbers than any other country. Russia, Hungary, and Romania have also received large numbers of refugees and all countries are assisting Ukrainian students with school assimilation.

However, many Ukrainians decided to stay home and not flee the war. The reasons for this vary, but many simply did not want to leave their husbands, sons, or other family members who stayed to fight against the Russians. Others felt that they did not have anywhere to go or were too frightened to move to a new country as it is an unknown entity to them. Others chose not to leave their pets or needed to care for elderly family members. Still more felt that they could stay to help with the war effort like supporting key jobs such as the distribution of food, hygiene products, and medicines to those still in the country including the Ukrainian soldiers.

Statistica.com reported a 35% forecast change in Ukraine's GDP in 2022 (2023) which has drastically affected the economic state of the country. Because so much has been destroyed and jobs have been lost, the invasion is making a major negative change in the fiscal health of the country. Families have reported that they are struggling to find a variety of food options, medical care is not always possible, and recreative opportunities are now non-existent. Electricity and power are not consistent which also affects the lives of all Ukrainians who are still in the country. With fears

of a missile strike, children and adults have trouble sleeping at night and rarely feel safe. They live with daily feelings of terror and hatred for the demolition of their beautiful country.

Due to all of these hardships, people from around the world have sought ways to support the people of Ukraine—those in country as well. The support of teachers as well as a small group of teens have made an important impact on the boys and girls who remain in Ukraine.

Support from Teachers for Students Remaining in Ukraine

In the late spring of 2022, a former education professor from California visited Poland with the intent of finding a way to support the children who are leaving the country of Ukraine. He worked diligently at the border to support the refugees by setting up camps and activities for the children who were passing through. While working with these small groups of children, additional volunteers were needed in the Polish schools where the immigrants would settle. This education professor then led physical education classes as well as basic English classes for the boys and girls who were new to Poland. Because of his interest and desire to actively work with children, he was introduced to a representative from the United Nations Commissions for Refugees who had begun to compile a list of children still in Ukraine and not able to attend school. He reached out to the lead author, who is a professor in special education, and the two of them began a quest to find willing and compassionate teachers who would support boys and girls in Ukraine virtually.

Recruiting teachers for this sensitive project consisted of sending a message to the education professors in the state of California as well as stellar former students who are now teachers in the United States. These volunteer teachers had to be aware of what would be appropriate to discuss with the children of war. The majority of the boys and girls have fathers who are fighting against the Russians; thus, fear and violence have been a part of the children's daily lives from the beginning of this project.

Eighteen teachers from California, but also, Texas, Ohio, and Oregon joined in the effort to support the boys and girls in Ukraine. Each teacher took 2–9 students depending on needs and schedules. Teachers created curriculum after meeting individually with the families and determining what would best support the students. Teachers and students were connected initially by using WhatsApp to communicate. Most students

worked on their English skills and the teachers used Google Translate as well as Babble, Berlitz, and Duolingo which offered free language courses for Ukrainians to quickly immerse themselves in a new language as needed.

Teachers remained in communication with one another to share ideas and collaborate on ways to support the students as this was a new venture for all. Teachers shared their opportunities to discuss the war by using the following online resources: Savethechildren.org and unicef.ie/stories/resources. Both resources guided the teachers with appropriate conversation starters to open up the dialogue about what the boys and girls were facing daily in Ukraine during this time of war. Teachers were sensitive and extremely careful when discussing the invasion, but students regularly opened up and shared their nervousness about the future, their daily fears about what would happen to their families and cities, and their terror regarding the explosions that they heard regularly.

In addition, the teachers used other online resources to help teach the students English including: Waterford.org/resources/free-audiobooks-for-kids, Rd.com/list/free-audiobooks-for-kids, YouTube videos, and Kahoot.com (pre-made games which included English greetings). Many of the students were given weekly vocabulary words to practice. Other ideas that the teachers used to support the students included the following: (1) food demonstrations using English descriptions, (2) students presented in English on the history of Ukraine or key holidays in their country, (3) students and teachers would watch part of a movie together in English and then discuss parts of the movie, and (4) teachers used Oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts and Ocean.si.edu/ocean-life to focus on science-based topics if the students expressed an interest in this subject. As needed, teachers were able to contribute to a local Ukrainian fund to get school supplies to the students as well.

Overall, the teachers focused on Josh Shipp's impactful short video called *The Power of One Caring Adult* which focused on his time as a foster youth and how one person made a major difference in his life. Teachers regularly shared pictures and inspiration with one another as teaching students living in war was difficult and painful to experience. The teachers sometimes felt that they could not truly understand what the boys and girls were experiencing, but by their encouragement of each other, they were able to continue this important work that supported their students and remembered the focus on "one caring adult" to make an impact on each life during such difficult times.

International Expressions of Kindness Showcase Support from Teens

In early January 2022, a small group of academics and practitioners, mostly members of two nonprofit organizations, Action for Media Education and Association for Moral Education, launched the International Expressions of Kindness: Multimedia Showcase. Initially, it was planned to create a safe, virtual space for children worldwide to express their feelings and thoughts on kindness. No one could predict then that the Russian invasion of Ukraine would instigate a new turn and direction of the project which oriented its Youth Advisory Board towards the support of Ukraine. Boys and girls in Ukraine were actively sought out to submit entries to the Showcase as well as to be able to read and witness the support of international youth entries from all over the world.

Thus, because of this project, teenagers from around the world mobilized to get their communities to support the youth in Ukraine at the start of the war through the International Expressions of Kindness Multimedia Showcase. There were 19 students on an advisory board between the ages of 12–17 from seven countries (South Korea, Russia, China, New Zealand, India, Poland, and United States) which encompassed four continents who attended bi-monthly zoom meetings. During these meetings, they discussed ideas for how they and the regions they live in could support children living in Ukraine during the invasion. They specifically talked about showing them kindness from around the world and also paying it forward by modeling acts of kindness in their honor.

Each teen on the advisory board was required to submit a showcase entry demonstrating kindness in one of the following categories: arts and crafts, technology innovations, music and dance, written word, and videos. For example, the second author chose to involve her dance team in supporting the boys and girls in Ukraine so she created Ukrainian flags and messages for each dance team member to hold while sending positive thoughts and prayers to them through photographs. She also advertised the multimedia showcase on her social media sites which gave neighbors, friends, classmates, and family members an opportunity to participate and spread kindness in a creative way. Increasing awareness of the war was also an important goal to keep students involved in caring for others. This helped children internationally to be cognizant of other children around the world who were dealing with extreme hardship. Each advisory board member was required to secure at least three additional entries for the showcase besides their own.

The International Expressions of Kindness Multimedia Showcase highlights wonderful ideas for anyone interested in spreading kindness including the following categories on the website: Resources for Children and Educators, Family Projects, Group Projects, and Child-Generated Kindness Curricula. Its mission is to provide a vehicle for children worldwide to share their thoughts and feelings about kindness and the many diverse ways it can be expressed. The goal is to provide youth an opportunity to act on their right of free expression through realistic, inspirational, ambitious, and motivational acts. Curriculum included on the website is for boys and girls ages 3–18 and their families. The primary aims include: (1) encouraging children to think critically and reflect about the meaning of kindness; (2) helping children recognize and acknowledge acts of kindness locally/nationally/internationally; (3) encouraging children to create, in their own unique voices, media messages about kindness that they would want to share with the world; (4) creating a safe, virtual space for children worldwide to express their thoughts and feelings about kindness; and (5) building a better understanding of children’s perception and expression of kindness.

The third author and her colleague, Amy Spangler, expanded the work of the multimedia showcase to create curricula materials titled *Connect with Kindness—Child-Generated Teacher-Friendly Curricular Materials* broken down by the following age groups: 4–10, 11–13, and 14–18. The materials for 4–10 year old boys and girls were also translated into Spanish. The materials were then tested in a pilot study during the fall of 2022 which included children from Cote d’Ivoire, Croatia, El Salvador, India, Italy, Lithuania, Nigeria, Portugal, Turkey, the United States, and Venezuela. The goal is to add these materials by continent to the showcase website. In addition, kindness vocabulary was developed for the different age groups. Also, due to this project, the third author and developing of the kindness curriculum will be teaching a course at the University of Turin in Italy this spring.

Conclusion

People around the world rallied to help those in Ukraine during this past year of the Russian invasion which rages on. Numerous supportive acts have occurred, but this manuscript highlighted two key movements. One showcased the support of a group of teachers around the United States

who believed that continued education would increase the knowledge and the spirits of the families remaining in Ukraine. The second project was instrumental in encouraging Ukrainian youth by demonstrating acts of kindness from numerous countries in their honor. The humanity of these two projects impacted many lives around the world and continues today.

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The Derogatory Portrayal of Women in Proverbs of Esan People of Nigeria

ABSTRACT. This paper adopts interpretive and descriptive approaches in the study of derogatory Esan proverbs targeted against women in the Esan indigenous society of Nigeria. The aim is to reveal whether the content of such anti-women local proverbs in Esan are valid or anachronistic in the light of the indigenous knowledge that proverbs are ideally known to convey, and judging by cultural and modern realities. Esan people are a tribe in Edo State of Nigeria and the three researchers of this paper are native speakers of the language. We harvested Esan proverbs through our public interactions with elders, and young and old adults in both rural and urban Esan communities. Our study reveals, amongst others, that the contents of derogatory Esan proverbs with women as subjects are not valid statements, but are products of centuries of enduring patriarchal systems insensitive to cultural and modern realities evidencing the numerous virtues and accomplishments of Esan women. The paper finally affirms that the anti-women local proverbs are part of the traditional structure that has fought the success of the thoroughbred modern agitations for female empowerment and the quest for gender equality.

KEYWORDS: Derogatory Esan proverbs, women oppression, indigenous culture, patriarchal system, female empowerment

Introduction

Proverbs, their use, function and what they represent in contemporary Africa have become a subject of vigorous scrutiny in contemporary African studies. In almost every African tribe, the ability to interlace proverbs in oracy is not a common feat. It is, perhaps, this thinking, which led to a renewed investigation of African proverbs, and this is evident in the works

of Mokitimi (1997), Avoseh (2012), Sefa (2014) and Aluede & Bello (2022) where they examined proverbs as the Voice of the People, as Theoretical Frameworks for Lifelong Learning in Indigenous African Education, as African Indigenous knowledge and the Institutional and Pedagogic Relevance for Youth Education and as a lead into African spirituality. The use and relevance of proverbs in indigenous parlance are not peculiar to African people alone. For example, Lubis (2018, p. 10) remarked that:

A Proverb is widely known in any society and is relatively much used although a proverb is normally inserted into a conversation or a discourse if the meaning of the proverb is relevant or will support the truth of the speaker's idea in the conversation or the discourse. For example, seeing a son behave like his father English speakers would say "An apple falls not far from its tree" or Indonesian speakers would say a drop of water from the roof will surely fall into the ditch which has a similar meaning to the English proverb.

Germane as African proverbs are in daily living and cultural communication among the peoples of Africa, one curiously finds a corpus of proverbs which pejoratively portrays women in many societies. For example, in the North, South, East and West of Nigeria, no community is left out of this negative portrayal of women in proverbs. Among the Esan people of Edo State in Nigeria where these writers are from, there is a humongous collection of proverbs that casts a derogatory gaze at women, which instigated the intellectual inquiry of this paper. Why is this negative depiction of women in Esan proverbs so? What status is the Esan woman accorded in her traditional society? Is gender equality attainable here? In this era of unconventional expression of sexuality such as transgenderism and hemophilic identities, are these proverbs not anachronistic and presently unnecessary? It is within this background that this study attempts to provide answers to these questions. The main objective of the study is to analyse the negative depiction of women in Esan proverbs to enable us to interpret the image of women in the Esan traditional society against the backdrop of contemporary realities.

Locale, Methods and Materials of the Study

In this study, the ethnographic method of inquiry to elicit data and provide answers to the questions raised in this work was used considering the

topic of investigation. We modified the technique due to inspiration from an Esan proverb, which states: “It is the leopard’s cud that can scratch the leopard’s forehead”—meaning, any animal which the leopard sees immediately turns its prey except its cud. In this study, women were, therefore, deployed to conduct interviews, carry out observations and also serve as interlocutors because they are best suited in this circumstance to interrogate their gender on a woman’s privates and dispositions. Twenty-five Esan proverbs were collected. This amounted to a total of fifty. To help the reader, understand the content and contextual meanings of the proverbs, they were first translated into English before analysis.

Theoretical Framework

There is a nested relationship between language and thought globally although the intensity may differ. At different points, the relationship between language and thought has been investigated by scholars of different persuasions. It is generally believed that language is a symbolic tool that we use to communicate our thoughts as well as represent our cognitive processes. This study is contingent on the linguistic relativity hypothesis re-echoed by Goksun, (2020), which holds that the language we speak changes our perception of the world and shapes our concepts. In short, language does not only pass across as a medium of communication, it is also a window through which the collective mindset of a people can be perceived. This theory is aptly a good premise for this study in the sense that beyond speaking a language for the sake of communication, we see a people’s construct of their worldview and cultural beliefs. We assert that the negativity against feminine gender in Esan proverbs is a sub-textual manifestation of pervasive gender bias and segregation in Esan traditional society, which the contemporary/modern Nigerian reality is struggling to erase/displace.

Proverbs and their Functions

Africa is rich in a variety of ways, including natural resources, manpower, and culture. Within the framework of culture, there is a wide range of heritage in religion, music, dance, art, architecture and oral literature. In the realm of oral literature, we find the immensely rich world of sto-

ries, fables, recitations, songs, poetry and proverbs (Mokitimi, 1997, p. vii). Writing further, Mokitimi says that many proverbs are catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals. They provoke further reflection and call for deeper thinking (Mokitimi, 1997, p. viii). No doubt, all over Africa, proverbs have a pride of place. In an attempt to encapsulate its functions, one can safely say that their roles are utilitarian and didactic. Discussing Esan proverbs specifically, Ebhomielen (2017) noted that African proverbs (Esan inclusive) are a medium of entrenching African indigenous knowledge and morality. If African proverbs are conduits for propagating knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals, one may wonder how and at what point they became tainted with amoral content and some of them laced with so much negativity about women. While this search is outside the remit of this current study, the portrayal of women as weak, subjective, irresponsible, unreliable, gullible, inferior and wicked is observably part of the devices of the male folks who believe that they occupy impeccable and inviolable status in the cultural and political echelon of the society. The constant look at women from male lenses of superiority and chauvinism is what, perhaps, has begotten the creation of a large body of derogatory proverbs against women in Esan. Subsequently, we argue that rather than denigrate womanhood in proverbs, its users should look out for those other apt ones, which could serve as alternatives to the dyslogistic ones and at some other points do a critical examination of the proverbs as they exist in the current socio-cultural milieu of the people. However, before we proceed, it is important to first of all discuss the subjective theory in literature because this study is hinged on it.

Subjectivity in Orature

By the term, orature, we mean the oral equivalent of literature—a collection of traditional folksongs, stories, etc., that is communicated orally (Oxford Dictionary of Contemporary English). Proverbs are part of folklore and a prominent constituent of orature. Proverbs in Esan have for many centuries been orally transmitted. It is just recently that they are beginning to receive scholarly attention and this is evident in the works of Ebhomielen (2017), Aluede & Bello (2022), to mention a few. The word ‘Subjective’ describes something that is based on a person’s opinion, biased influences and individual experiences, instead of objective facts derived from empirical findings. In literature, the ambiguous portraiture of female characters

by some male writers and the phallic nature of men's writings has proved a matter of concern to female writers in Africa. For decades within African writing the issue of silencing was interrogated particularly as it addressed the muting and marginalization of black women by male writers through the script of patriarchy, which men follow (Smith & Ce, 2015). Has much been achieved in this trend? As it is in Nigeria in general and Esan in particular, this ambiguity in the portraiture of women is yet to be corrected. For example, North, South, East and West of Nigeria, evidences abound of proverbs about the portrayal of women in the pejorative sense. These biased creative experiences are aptly captured by Olarinmoye (2013), Dickson & Mbosowo (2014), Ezeifeke (2017), Yakubu (2018), Emeka-Nwobia & Ndimele (2019) and Onukawa (2021). While issues about male selfhood is presented in a biased manner, which favours or exalts masculinity or the male image, those of womanhood suffer distortions with a high measure of subjectivity. This tendency is noticeable in Esan stock of proverbs.

A critical aspect of feminist criticism of patriarchy is the subjective portrayal of women. Subjectivity is closely intertwined with ideology and sexuality. Female subjectivity encapsulates the subjective portrayal of the physical, mental, spiritual, and communal lives of the female gender in a patriarchal society. It also explains the gender relations between men and women in a patriarchal society. In patriarchy, unequal power relations place men at the upper rung of the social ladder over women, and folklore is among the social tools used to sustain the status quo (Okin, 1998; Kaufman, 1999). Consequently, Volpp (2001) remarked that sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, age, and nationality, among others, are used in patriarchal societies as bases of difference and oppression against men to some extent, and against women to a large extent. To fight anti-feminist moves, Eke & Njoku (2020, p. 151) opine that: Many variants of feminism have been branded over time and that has given feminism a multiple identity. One of the new revelations of feminism in recent times is 'Afropolitan Feminism', a branch of African feminism [...] conceived to deal with the story of African women in the homeland and the diaspora trying to assume the status of world citizens (metropolitans) to de-emphasize their origins. To what extent these movements have achieved their set goals is not within the remit of this paper. However, in most Nigerian communities, not much has been achieved. Even the female folks are often heard and seen seemingly aligning with men to utter anti-feminist/anti-woman proverbs in social gatherings—a possible cultural self-enslavement mentality, which may take a longer time to deal with. In Esan of old, under the guise of spirit or ances-

tral manifestation, a masquerade could warn an alleged erring woman, call her names, and pronounce judgments on her, which must be obeyed in the community. Contrastingly, it is the men who perform such roles as masked ancestral spirits. The question is: are the males above the law? If women's excesses are procedurally checked, how are the males' checked? There is this air of superiority enveloping all the men in the community and it is this thinking which has underpinned their opinions of women as weaker vessels, and they are thus perpetually relegated. The foregoing exposition is important so that we can see how some Esan negative beliefs of women have been transmuted into folklore, folksongs and proverbs—proverbs being our primary concern.

Esan Women in Proverbial Lore

Proverbs occupy a very important position in the lives of the people of Nigerian ethnic groups. And its functions cannot be over-emphasized. For example, while examining its attributes in Northern Nigeria, Yakubu (2017, p. 44) remarked that:

In pre-Islamic Hausaland, proverbs encapsulated the people's history and philosophy of life. This was more so because the people could not read and write. Their history and beliefs were stored and coded in some special people's mental capacities. They [were] then transmitted orally within various literary genres, proverbs inclusive, whenever the need arose.

Whether pre-Islamic era or not, proverbs still have their unique value even in contemporary Hausaland and by extension other Nigerian cultures. To date in Esan land, their proverbs are repositories of their indigenous knowledge resources which contain their beliefs/ philosophies and which integrate all aspects of human endeavours. In these proverbs, we find the people's construct about God, their neighbours, life, living, death and many other subjects. In all of these, women have played outstanding roles. For example, in Esan, we hear stories of great women who have played godly roles and saved the land from catastrophes. No doubt, proverbs are meant to correct, admonish, teach, reinforce one's cultural beliefs and at some other points deride. It is, however, appalling that while there appears to be no significant number of proverbs which deride men, we find effortlessly quite an impressive collection that deride and harshly judge women.

Negative Construction of Woman in Esan Proverbs

In this research, we would like to refer to construction as a generally conceived notion or belief within a given culture. Therefore, to talk of the 'negative construction' of Esan women, we mean the damaging, undesirable or unfavourable evaluation of Esan women as captured in the texts of selected Esan proverbs. Verbal assault and violence against persons are not perpetrated by men alone in today's world. For example, Plonka (2020) affirmed that violence touches different spheres of our lives and different environments. He talked of five forms of violence which are physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and a failure to take proper care of both the physical and emotional needs of someone. In his account, he also said that men usually hide the fact of being abused out of fear of public stigma. Since men often take younger females as wives, ageist tendencies often set in on account of dwindling finances, physical fitness, and social relevance, to mention a few. According to him, some women often latch into such conditions to pay spouses back for previous misdeeds of several decades ago.

Below, we present different kinds of proverbs. They are calibrated under different themes that tend to disparage Esan women and the proverbs are further interrogated to elicit their pejorative components. These will be discussed under six sub-headings, which are: women as tale bearers and unreliable beings, women as incompetent folks and ever dependent on men, women as sex objects and satirizing their bodies, women as inferior species and as poor thinkers and selfish beings.

1. Women as Tale Bearers and Unreliable Beings. It is not all Esan proverbs that depict women as tale bearers and unreliable beings that are presented here but only a representative number to avoid superfluity; likewise, those selected under other categories.

- i. Olo nai ho no ve – A secret, which should not be divulged,
A i ta ma okhuo – is not told to a woman.
- ii. A i ri okhuo si uman non i ve – A woman is not expected to be admitted into secrecy lest the secret be exposed.
- iii. Ramunde okpea nin ako ghae, ọle zele okhuo i ta ese nin ozeva le lu na len.

Because of the same man who is being shared that is why a woman does not tell of the good deeds that her mate has done for her. These prov-

erbs listed in this category and translated help to illustrate the fixed notion in the racial memory of the Esan patriarchal socio-cultural system that women are natural gossip, unreliable and incapable of keeping secrets. This is not an exaltation of womanhood but denigration in a male-dominated society where contrastively most men, including the high and the mighty, attribute their successes to their mothers and adore their mothers more than their fathers.

2. Women as incompetent Folks and Ever Dependent on Men. This category of Esan proverbs declares women as incompetent and indolent. It is another negative portrait of women in the linguistic culture and collective mindset of the people, which erroneously demeans their worth and essence in the Esan worldview no matter the numerous facts of their great exploits, hard work, diligence and personal achievements surpassing those of the male folks in the indigenous culture.

- i. Re igho mẹn, re igho mẹn, ọle okhuo ta. Ọ bha lẹn igho i nọghomin na rẹ kuan – Give me money, Give me money. This is the mantra of a woman. She knows not that money is difficult to truly make.
- ii. Okhuo ha yu, When a wife dies, a i nọ ọdọ le ebe ọ fi ya na lẹn. her husband is not asked what his wife left to beinherited.
Ọdọ okhuo ha yu, When a husband dies, a kiha nọ ebe ọdo fi ya. his wife will be asked what her husband left to be inherited.

3. Women as Sex Objects. The male perception of women as sex symbols is a universal cultural reality, expressed in language and other symbolic forms. Esan proverbs capture such reality as well and portray women as the gender with an insatiable appetite for intercourse as seen in the examples below.

- i. Aho mẹn, Mate me,
aho men, mate me,
ọle okhuo lẹn lẹn. That is what a woman knows.
Ọ bha lẹn ekuẹ She does not know that the penis
nọghọ okpea udonmin. take time to get erect.
- ii. Ọdọ okhuo i yu. A woman's husband never dies.
Aba eni ibhokhan yu. It is the children's father who dies.
- iii. Ọnọ ri okhuo bhi udu It is he who is on a woman's chest
ọ le ẹhi ọle. That is her guardian angel.

The second example under this category is not true. There are quite a lot of women who have chosen not to remarry at the death of their husbands. This proverb is unmindful of such realities. Observably, Esan proverbs that portray women as sex objects are a cultural relegation and negation of women's sexuality, created and reinforced by the male folks. In African traditional societies, it is the male's selfish and verbal tool to suppress women's sexuality, to drive repressions in them and hold them slavishly bound to their male groins. Ironically, the men in African traditional societies, as it is in the Esan cultural reality, are more promiscuous than the female folks judging by the unbridled polygamous nature of the men.

4. Satirizing the Woman's Body. Physiological and anatomical characteristics of women, their mental dispositions and habits, etc, real or imagined, are subjects of criticism in some Esan proverbs, some of which are listed below. The underlying motivation of the speaker may not be to deride nor compliment, but to provide appropriate speech fillers or a convenient idiom to drive home a contextual message in any speech event. The point, however, is that, the unpleasant or derisive description of the female or girl body alluded to in such speech event is derogatory.

- i. A i gbe okhuo ba No woman is ever crucified because
edin khuere. her private part is too loose or watery.
- ii. Ekhọ i lu edin omobọ, A little girl's vagina is never shy,
eji ghon len ole da yanlan it is displayed freely anywhere.
- iii. Edin obhokhan It with a toddler's vagina
le a re mu osi owanre that one knows how adults will probably look like.
- iv. Okhuo yi odọ le ukpekuẹ tiẹin A woman taunts her husband for
having a small penis
ọ yelea ọle zede mon hiehie but she has forgotten that she does not
have at all.
Amẹn i ka bhi edin se Fluid cannot be so scarce in a woman's vagina,
ọ bha se ekuẹ re kha. that it will not be sufficient for the penis to
bathe itself.
- v. Eba re nyan omọ It is what can be used to pamper a child
ọ le a re nyan omọ. that is used to pamper a child.
Okhuo i nye edin bhi otọ No woman spreads out her vagina nin omọ
ha ghe. for her child to watch.

5. Women as an inferior Species. Sometimes, in Esan proverbs, women are regarded as inferior beings compared to their male folks as some of the examples listed below illustrate. It does not also matter to the Esan male speaker the correctness of any claims in the content of the proverb because he is jokingly relegating the women folk in a lighted-hearted speech event or local parlance.

- i. Okhuo non mon obọ A wealthy woman
dia bi okpea ni obọ gbele. is equivalent to a male pauper.
- ii. Ebo okhuo hi re hu ye No matter how huge,
la o fe ye, wealthy or influential a woman is
okpea hen olen. it is a man who climbs her.
- iii. Eji okpea re eto okhuo le Where ever a man leaves hair in the head
of his wife
ole adese uhomon is the centre of her head.

The first example here is an exaggeration because there is no way, even in Esan cultural reality, that a male pauper can enjoy equal status, respect and recognition as a wealthy female who would be his employer in her farms or trade. The male speaker resorts to proverbs with such hyperbolic allusions to derogate a woman's cultural, social and economic status to reinforce a dominant or subconscious belief in a male superiority or to vent his egoistic principle in normal conversations or parley with women. The hilarious second example under this category which asserts that no matter the financial status of a woman or physical built, a man climbs her during sexual intercourse is often said to command a woman's total submission to her husband or partner irrespective of her accomplishments. Anyway, any modern Esan man, who resorts to such proverbs in conversations, is aware that even a woman (diminutive or poor) can also climb on a rich or gigantic man in sexual intercourse.

6. Women as Poor Thinkers and selfish people. The Esan proverbs under this category deride the female folks as having a low mentality and self-centred when in fact the same male folks know that this is not exactly true of most Esan women who are known to be very supportive of their husbands and have sometimes been the breadwinners of some families.

- i. Ilo okpa okhuo ze: A woman reasons one-sided:
Odo le a yu, if her husband dies,

ọle ki bi ọdọ ọbhebhe. she will marry another one.
 Ọ i wẹ ole a yu she does not say if she dies
 ọdọ a re okhuo ọbhebhe . her husband will also marry another lady.

The view of Emeka-Nwobia & Ndimele (2019) in another context describing male relegation of women can be borrowed here to describe the motivation behind the Esan proverbs in this category when they said “women sometimes are constructed as supplanters capable of disposing their husbands and other members of their societies of their thing subtly. Sometimes they are constructed as using sweet tongues to dispossess their husbands of their belongings/valuables or sometimes constructed negatively as selfish folks capable of utilizing manipulative languages to make their husbands act otherwise (Emeka-Nwobia & Ndimele, 2019).

Conclusion

There are, indeed, many Esan proverbs that are anti-women, only a representative number has been selected for study in this paper. To answer why the contents of such proverbs are derogatory of women rests squarely on the nature of traditional African societies which have been essentially and largely patriarchal, and have subjected women to centuries of subjugation. Such experience gave birth to uncensored anti-women cultural mindsets and their attendant linguistic forms. The findings of this study have revealed that the content of these derogatory Esan proverbs does not portray the true reality of women. In most cases, the male speaker does not speak such proverbs because he is unaware of the numerous virtues of women which render such pejorative portrayal of women unfair, repugnant and uncomplimentary representations. The male Esan speaker of such proverbs, more often than not, sees himself in unconscious or thoughtless participation in a linguistic event in which such proverbs become a handy expression to buttress or illustrate a point rather than with an intent to vilify womanhood. This is not to say too that, there are no male speakers of Esan proverbs who also deliberately or consciously use such anti-women Esan proverbs to emphasise or reinforce the dominant belief in male superiority over women, to remind the woman about her place among the oppressed in the society.

The truth, however, is that the Esan woman, or women generally in the African society (traditional or modern), deserve better respect and

pride of place than she is portrayed in the corpus of derogatory Esan proverbs; likewise, in other ethnic cultures with similar traditional uncomplimentary linguistic slang against women. Esan men (young and old), and those from other ethnicities, can testify to the fact that women have won themselves higher recognition and honour to deserve equal recognition and respect with men. What years of female agitation for empowerment, justice and equality on the African continent will need to perpetually fight to succeed is the dominant and resistant patriarchal system which took its sustenance from the oppressive indigenous traditional authorities.

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Understanding Gender Power Relations and Emotions of Rohingya Adolescent Girls in Bangladesh

ABSTRACT. This paper sheds light on the intertwined aspects of gender, power, and emotion by exploring the lived experiences of Rohingya adolescent girls who are at risk of GBV which is widespread in camp settings. Narrative interviews and focus group discussions offered opportunities to twenty-five unmarried and married adolescent girls to talk about gender-based discrimination and violence in everyday household and community practices that reconstruct gender and power dynamics and shape girls' emotions. Drawn from the elements of the three domains of power (McDonald, 1980), the paper shows that the prevailing sexist practices in Rohingya society divide "girls" and "boys" into two different categories and create conditions for subordination of girls on the basis of sex-based irrational differentiation. Such power capability rooted in the contexts of power bases put boys as a group in the position to use power in extreme form as violence and successful power use underlies power outcomes. Importantly, negative emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, guilt, and disgust interact with these three domains of power. Projects that define power as empowerment would be supportive for girls' empowerment and experience of positive emotions.

KEYWORDS: girls, gender dynamics, power dynamics, emotions, Bangladesh

Introduction

The interrelation between power and emotion is gaining prominence in the contemporary literature on power. Prior research demonstrates that "positive and negative views of power are likely to be associated, respectively, with positive and negative emotions (e.g., pleasure, enthusiasm, pride or anger, fear, sadness)" (Lawler & Proell, 2009, p. 169). Importantly, one interpretation of the positive and negative emotions is that "positive emotions make individuals well and happy, and negative emotions make individuals ill and unhappy" (Solomon & Stone, 2002, p. 422).

“Under the broad umbrella of the psychodynamic approach, emotions are considered to be individual and subjective feelings that may lead to different behavioral manifestations or reactions” (Hökkä et al., 2020, p. 3). Emotions can, thus, be considered as important drivers of behaviors (Izard, 2009, p. 2; Beaudry & Pinsonneault, 2010, p. 690). Similar to the “considerable debate on the nature and ontology of emotions” (Hökkä et al., 2020, p. 3), “power as a concept has several conceptual and operational definitions” (Suliman, 2019, p. 1). Some definitions refer power as “the ability of a person or group to get another person or group to do something against their will” (Rowlands, 1997, pp. 9–10). According to these definitions, “power can be described as ‘Zero-sum’: the more power one has, the less the other has” (Rowlands, 1997, pp. 9–10). This negative view of power is labeled as ‘power over’ used as a synonym for ‘power as domination’ (Allen, 1998, p. 22; Pansardi & Bindi, 2021, p. 51). Another way of conceptualizing power is to relate the definition of power with ‘power to’, ‘power with’, and ‘power from within’ and one aspect of ‘power to’ is the kind of leadership that comes from the wish to see a group achieve what it is capable of, where there is no conflict of interests, and the group is setting its own collective agenda (Rowlands, 1997, p. 12). This positive view of power labeled as ‘power to’ is equivalent to power as empowerment (Allen, 1998, pp. 22–27; Pansardi, 2012, p. 73).

Notably, “if power is defined as ‘power over’, a gender analysis shows that power is wielded predominantly by men over other men, and by men over women” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 11). Given that “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power” (Scott, 1986, p. 1067); “understanding gender is thus significant to understand power and vice versa” (Koester, 2015, p. 1) and corresponding emotions of girls, specifically, adolescent girls who internalize oppression and are particularly vulnerable as they often face much greater adversity than boys including gender discrimination and are at higher risk than boys for mental health difficulties (Hartas, 2019, pp. 2–3). This paper sheds light on the intertwined aspects of gender, power, and emotion by exploring the lived experiences of Rohingya adolescent girls who were forcibly displaced from Myanmar into Bangladesh in the face of systematic discrimination, persecution, and violence.

Since the massive influx which started on 25 August 2017, over 720,000 Rohingya fled to Teknaf and Ukhiya sub-districts of Cox’s Bazar district of Bangladesh and created the largest refugee settlement and the

world's fastest growing refugee crisis in history (Ainul et al., 2018, UNDP, 2018; UNICEF, 2018). The vast majority of the forcibly displaced population are women and girls (ISCG, 2019, p. 1) and "girls who represent a larger proportion (57%) of the vulnerable group, are particularly at risk of neglect, sexual exploitation, and abuse" (ISCG, 2019, p. 1), and different forms of psychological and physical violence given that gender-based violence is widespread in camp settings (Islam & Nuzhath, 2018; Tay et al., 2018; Guglielmi et al., 2020).

Interestingly, Rohingya girls' exposure to sexual violence in Myanmar is understood as a result of Security Forces' "deeply gendered conceptions of power" (Global Justice Center, 2018, p. 1). Thus, the practice of age and gender-based violence targeted to Rohingya adolescent girls in camp settings draws attention to the phenomenon of 'power disparities', specifically, 'gender inequities in power' by recognizing that boys have power over girls, and that boys' domination and girls' subordination in hierarchical system is constructed on the basis of sex-based irrational differentiation. This kind of unjust power as dominance expressed in the form of violence is problematic for Rohingya adolescent girls because "sexual violence is related to the consequences of social stigma for the family of the girls, and difficulty getting the girl married in the future leading to economic consequences of additional family members" (Guglielmi et al., 2020, p. 2). Additionally, such negative power in the form of sexual and domestic violence may reproduce girls' conceptualization of socially defined gendered girls and boys, and sex difference-based power/powerlessness and influence girls' emotional well-being in negative ways.

Prior research on power analysis conducted in the Rohingya community in Bangladesh addresses household and community decision making and suggests that men hold decision-making power in both settings (Joint Agency Research Report, 2018). Besides, patrilocal marriage and the practice of dowry are identified as factors contributing to women's lack of power in household (Tay et al., 2018). Given that boys' violence against girls is frequent in Forcibly Displaced Myanmar Nationals (FDMN) community, it is also crucial to explore: In which ways differences between Rohingya adolescent boys and girls and corresponding system of domination are justified and sustained in Rohingya community? In other words, what are the conditions under which having a resource is sufficient for Rohingya boys to influence Rohingya girls in the absence of power use? Additionally, how the power is used in social relationships? What are the power outcomes? What are the emotions do Rohingya girls experience? To answer these

questions, this paper draws elements from the three domains of power (McDonald, 1980, p. 843) and uses a) power bases (refer to the sources of power and is synonymous with resources), b) Power use (how the power is used i.e., the tactics chosen), and c) power outcomes (who ultimately possesses the control or who wins) as framework. The assumption of the research is that power bases lead to power use and power use is the basis for real power, and emotions interconnect all three levels of power. The insights gained from this empirical research will contribute to knowledge advancement and be useful for those who aspire to better comprehend, critique, and contest the subordination of Rohingya adolescent girls in a range of family, community, and cultural contexts and support girls to avoid pain and experience pleasure and happiness in general.

The paper is organized into three sections. Section one introduces concepts of gender, power and emotions taking into account of Rohingya adolescent girls' experiences of gender-based violence in camp contexts and describes methodological choice adopted to answer research questions. Section two provides evidence regarding the paradigm of power over, specifically, boys' power over girls in FDMN community and girls' experience of emotions. Section three concludes.

1. Methodological Choice

This empirical research is designed to understand and potentially improve the lives of Rohingya adolescent girls by un-silencing the silenced, criticizing gender inequality and discrimination and resulting power dynamics that operate in 'everyday life' (Bovone, 1989, p. 41). Given that there are different ways of doing such research, this research starts with the view that "stories can be the foundation to change in the sense that stories, a crucial part of human culture, give us insights into individual and collective senses of 'how things should be done' and thus allow us to contest dominant modes of understanding, practice, and reproduction" (Fraser & Tylor, 2020, p. 8).

Furthermore, this research takes into account of injustice and oppression and prioritizes social justice and fairness. Consequently, the research involves Rohingya adolescent girls who are: a) devalued or ignored by being 'stateless population' (Rahman & Sakib, 2021, p. 159) in Myanmar which led them to be excluded from formal research (UNHCR, 2019, p. 51) and deprived them from expressing their stories or voices, and b) designated as oppressed or vulnerable as many of them have experienced violence

against girls and represent low socio-economic background. Providing an opportunity to tell personal stories, be heard, and representing these girls' stories or voices in a fair way can be considered as an important social justice issue (Fraser & Tylor, 2020). Therefore, decision was made to understand Rohingya adolescent girls' lives using narrative interviews given that the technique is most pertinent for studies which focus on disadvantaged or marginalized groups in societies and the technique is a way of collecting stories or narratives about girls' experiences or views of how the everyday practices reconstruct gender and power dynamics and shape emotions around these practices (Bates, 2004, pp. 16–17; Anderson & Kirkpatrick, 2015).

Besides narrative interviewing, focus group discussions were chosen to gain data from Rohingya adolescent girls given that “focus groups are useful in accessing the attitudes, feelings, and experiences of groups who have been marginalized or silenced within society and who may feel disenfranchised or unsafe to participate in a research study” (Aanand, 2013, p. 2). Notably, girls are in general marginalized and silenced group in the Rohingya society.

Both narrative interviews and group discussions offered opportunities to bring these marginalized girls into the fore front. The girls who were aged between twelve and nineteen years, shared their stories, experiences, views, beliefs, and attitudes about the sensitive topic of GBV drawn from the interaction pattern in male-female sibling relation, and marital relation. All in-person data was collected between December 2019 and February 2020 from three camp settings in Cox's Bazar.

The narrative interviews provided an emotional space for the four unmarried and three married adolescent girls to talk freely about their experiences in the form of stories. These girls who manage household chores in daily life, preferred to be interviewed. To facilitate the interview process, top-down strict questions and answers were avoided. Interestingly, opening up an interview with a broad question, the researcher's willingness to be led by the pace and interests of the research participants, and the use of the open-ended questions as follow-up questions were useful to get data that has rich detail.

In the focus group discussion, two groups of girls who manage household chores and one group of girls who support adolescent girls as facilitators of an adolescent life-skill program displayed cohesion and connectedness when discussing their experiences that they felt important to share. The natural interaction and conversation among the girls enabled them

to recognize the nature of their shared overt or hidden common experiences and thus to collectively construct new meanings about the interplay of gender, power, and emotions. Thus, the group discussions served as a platform for understanding and empowering of girls. Interestingly, in the democratic environment of group discussions, each and every girl's experiences, and voices were listened to and recorded carefully, consequently, the girls felt that they all are valued and that all of their shared experiences were equally important.

At the end of the narrative interviews and the group discussion, some participants expressed their feelings to the researcher highlighting that they have never shared their painful experiences with others who are even close to them either because of the concern that it would be difficult for their family to hear these difficult experiences or due to the fear of the potential result of the self-disclosure. Importantly, research participants' trust regarding the researcher's intention to protect them as well as their understanding about the fact that they will be listened to and believed by the researcher in a non-judgmental way helped them to disclose all that they wanted to discuss. According to the research participants, such opportunities for self-disclosure of personal experiences enabled them to feel better.

During analysis and constructing knowledge, the researcher's role was to interpret the data fairly and to acknowledge the dynamics of power over that have emerged from the nuanced narratives and group discussions.

2. The Paradigm of Power Over and Girls' Experiences of Emotions

This section illustrates voices and experiences of Rohingya adolescent girls who have experienced gender-based discrimination and violence in a range of family and community cultural contexts. The voices of these girls illustrate the paradigm of power over that is shaped by power bases, power use, and power outcomes and the link of the paradigm of power over to girls' experiences of emotions.

2.1. Power Bases

A range of ideas demonstrate the sources of male power in the FDMN Community. The two possible sources of power emerged from girls' voices include: *normative resources*—i.e., cultural and sub-cultural definitions of who has the authority and *cognitive resources*—i.e., the influence the perception of power has on the individuals and others.

2.1.1. Normative resources: Cultural and sub-cultural definitions of who has the authority

Culturally determined position of power

The social structure of the FDMN community indicate uneven nature of power-based resource distribution and such unequal distribution results in men and women's imbalanced way of power to act. In many instances, the structure involves a position that provides *Head Majhis*, and *Side Majhis*, male local leaders, with resources or capability that others value. Specifically, customs legitimate these *Majhis* to the power of decision-making concerning adolescent girls' wellbeing and girls accept the decisions because *Majhi* has the authority to command and girls have duties to obey. Women in this context also should be given the opportunity to occupy positions of power in terms of decision making, however, in line with the reasoning that women cannot be decision makers as like men, women are largely excluded from holding the key positions and governing decisions that facilitate marginalized adolescent girls to make choices available to them. Given that the opportunity context that creates adequate conditions for *Majhis'* ableness to act as powerful group and to perform the role of decision makers, the *Majhis* often govern male biased decisions concerning violence against adolescent girls including 'sexual abuse', 'approval of the changing marriage pattern that permits polygamy' etc. and thus set rules for justice that effectively prevent girls, as less powerful group, from voicing their wishes. The power of making these rules essentially meets the interests of boys and contribute to sustain the dominant ideologies concerning patriarchal power and control, and relations of domination. For example, decision that influences girls to 'remain silent to the aggressive act of rape' means supporting the conscious process of intimidation by which boys keep girls in a state of fear (Connell, 1985, p. 264; McPhail, 2016, p. 3). Additionally, decision that 'permit men's physical aggression and verbal threats towards adolescent girls in order for justifying polygamous marriage' suggests approval of oppressive conditions that create unequal male-female power relations. Thus, the masculine nature of social structure creates conditions for sustaining the system of domination by 'excluding girls and women from the power to determine the rules under which they will live as well as by triggering the status, authority, and negative liberty of the male agents, in other words, *Majhis*, to make decisions that bear detrimental effects on girls' interests and freedom.

Power derived from customary law and practices of polygamy

Another example of structural inequality is evident in the customary law and practices of polygamy that is widespread in FDMN community and that permits men to marry multiple wives and prohibits a present wife from objecting to her husband's marriage to a new woman (Brook, 2009, p. 113). Hence, polygamy deprives girls as a group from power and authority, and represents an unjustified asymmetry of power between boys and girls that legitimizes conditions for girls' subordination (Brook, 2009).

Access to economic resources as the source of power

According to the local system of meaning, the conditions for relations of domination is maintained in the household as families allow boys to access economic resources i.e., income. Furthermore, cultural norms also suggest that "Rohingya girls are dignified when Rohingya men and boys can support their families" (Holloway & Fan, 2018, p. 7). Hence, girls' exclusion from access to subjectively relevant resources and, thereby, not being able to be financial provider for the family may reinforce 'decentralized domination', in other words, 'a group of girls' dependency over a group of boys' (Mader, 2016, p. 450). A girl describes the unequal allocation of task responsibilities that indicates difference in distribution of power-based resources in boy-girl relationship as,

A boy can bring fruits for the family what a girl cannot. Boys can cultivate rice, do business, and spend money as they wish. Girls cook rice, and stitch cloth ... a girl's involvement in earning would be sinful for a girl because boys will see her when she is out of home ... it is forbidden to use a daughter's earned money (FGD, unmarried adolescent girl, December 2019).

Thus, culture defines who has the authority in household by encouraging girls' inclusion in private space and influencing girls to conceptualize the difference in male-female boundary to act.

Stereotypic expectations in family

A range of gender-typed practices are evident in Rohingya families that contribute to the gender-differences in expectations, values, preferences, and skills. In most instances, family sets primary goals for girls including marriage, performing domestic responsibilities, and accessing religious education. Girls interpret the internalized message of such goal

setting as, “girls will stay home, perform light tasks such as bringing water using small pots, access religious education, get married, and cook rice in in-law’s house”. Hence, family facilitates the process of marriage and girls’ dependence over boys by increasing girls’ age when preparing SIM card in order for enabling girls to get married before they reach eighteen years. In contrast, boys’ independence is greatly encouraged by conveying the meaning that boys will “go to abroad”, “work in a shop”, “do business and agricultural work”, and “do heavy work such as bringing relief items e.g., rice, flour, and gas for use in domestic space”. These cultural scripts define the one-sided allocation of domestic work and corresponding one-sided dependency and thus recreates conditions for sustaining boys’ power over girls.

Cultural norms influencing expert power

Culture also defines who has the authority by depriving girls from accessing other forms of rights, liberties, options, possibilities, choices and easier access to benefits that are often available to boys. A girl explicitly states the ways in which cultural norms function as determining constraints of girls’ education and training and thus mediate conditions for gender and power inequality. A girl’s remark such as, “I was withdrawn from class V due to my marriage but my brother continued till class X and he is earning as Head Majhi and Imam and keeping his children in school” indicates the ways in which the cultural emphasis on early marriage limits family decision about girls’ education and training and creates differences in girls’ and boys’ expertise and thus excludes girls from accessing such power-based resources. Besides formal education, boys’ aspirations to “learn how to drive, and play ball, cricket, and corks; are appreciated by family, by contrast, girls are encouraged to “cook and knit”. All these exclusionary practices sustain the difference in boys’ and girls’ role competence and cultural devaluation of girls’ strength. As a result, girls gradually learn that expert power imbalances, differential privilege, bias, and discrimination are systematically prevalent in sibling relationships.

Family shaped emotion as the source of power

Besides differential privileges in education and training, family preference to suppress girls’ pleasant feelings but to support boys’ such feelings can be viewed as source for male power in family context. Thus, ‘emotion as power-based resource’ creates an enabling condition for maintaining

the system of domination. According to cultural norms, 'girls cannot take pictures with others but family allows boys to do so'. Additionally, the distribution of goods and resources indicates representation of one-sided interests i.e., boys' interests. Examples such as 'family meets brothers' desire to buy whatever they wish including a car [van], however, sisters' desire to buy cosmetics are suppressed by saying that money cannot be spent as they wish'; 'family provides transport fare, money to smoke and eat betel leaf for the pleasure of brothers who are not earning, but girls are not supported by money even if they ask for money to buy food when they are hungry'; 'a girl saves money and a boy spends money'; 'when a brother and a sister eat together the brother takes the plate of good quality and sits on stool and the sister sits on the floor and takes the plate of poor quality'; 'when there is a disagreement between a brother and a sister family conveys the message that the brother will eat before the sister eats'; and 'family evaluates girls' behavior negatively and remains silent centering girl-boy sibling disputes specifically when brothers demonstrate physical violence and power over sisters'. These instances demonstrate that girls are largely undervalued in domestic space and such process of devaluation reproduces conditions for maintaining the system of domination in sibling relation. In most instances, family nurtures these differences between boys and girls because of the taken for granted perception that 'girls are the guests for few days in parental home, by contrast, boys are the future guardian of girls in the absence of parents. Furthermore, in domestic space, family behavior demonstrates greater affection towards boys compared to girls 'by ignoring boys' mistakes because boys have access to public space, as a result, they can leave home which is not possible for girls. Girls in such family contexts gradually learn culturally defined hierarchical status and culturally legitimated authority of boys in girl-boy sibling relations.

Power influenced by religious norms

Cultural and religious norms also define who has the authority by regulating girls' freedom of movement. For girls who have reached puberty, religious ideologies entail the meaning that 'it would be sinful for girls if boys see girls'. Despite that boys can go to 'market places', 'cut trees in hilly areas', 'return home at night'; in many instances, an unmarried girl is 'not allowed to visit market place with her brother to buy cloth of her own choice'; and 'needs an umbrella to hide her from boys when she moves unescorted from her house to a neighboring house located nearby'. Such cultural norms diminish girls' liberties, perhaps in return of security, and

provide boys as group with power to move freely and thus maintain the background condition for systems of domination. Girls' understanding of the relationship between girls' visibility and religious norms was evident when a girl was interviewed in a closed room. During the interview, as many times as she heard the voice of a male person passing by the interview room, she pulled down her face cloth to cover her face. This behavior suggests the gender-segregated socialization process in which she has grown up. As the girl describes,

When I was in Myanmar, schools were far away from my home. This is why I studied in a *Maktab* (religious school). When I reached 7 years, I stopped going to *Maktab* and moved around our courtyard. When I reached 12 years, I stopped to bring water from our courtyard. I have grown up only staying inside the home (*sat gherar vitor*). There was no scope for gossiping with girls, consequently, I did not have any friend. I passed time by talking to my mother and elder sister and helping my mother in her day-to-day cooking (Narrative interview, married adolescent girl, 3rd February, 2020).

The quote shows the ways in which cultural norms restrict girls' autonomy in movement and thereby accessing education. Thus, cultural norms shape girls' opportunity context that bears constraining effects instead of enabling effects (Einspahr, 2010) that negatively influence girls' power as being able to.

Use of culturally defined gendered space as power source

Girls' experiences describe cultural definitions of who has the authority by illustrating the idea of the use of gendered space. Girls' use of gendered space in FDMN community is influenced by the practice of using gendered space in Myanmar. According to cultural norms and practice in Myanmar, adolescent boys play outside home but girls play in the garden located behind the home and in those houses where adolescent and adult boys and men are absent. Such practices sustain the exclusionary nature of girls' use of public space and reestablish the idea of domestic as girls' space. Additionally, as girls' reach puberty a curtain made of cloth is used to cover the courtyard of many girls' homes. One side of the curtain is used for girls to gossip and play and the other side is used by men to leave or enter the home. This dividing practice of the use of the domestic space indicates the constructed nature of gendered space and meaning of separate sphere within domestic space. The custom of dividing practice is

sustained in humanitarian settings where girls experience excluded from male gendered spaces. A girl's remark such as, "Girls will not go to shop because boys gossip in shops. Girls will gossip at home and boys will not be there. For boys, there are playground to play ball, shops, and market to sit. For girls, there are not many spaces except home" indicates that shops, playgrounds, and markets, in other words, public spaces are male spaces and domestic is for females and there are specific signs, and codes for girls in everyday routine use of forbidden male gendered spaces. In this context, cultural norms and gender ideologies that sustain boundary in girls' and boys' use of spaces create situations where "girls encounter relative constraints in their freedom of using public space and accessing options compared with boys who due to their social positions have more options or easier access to benefits (Einspahr, 2010, p. 6).

2.1.2. Cognitive resource: Perception of power

In the research context, girls' perception or cognitive resource suggests that boys as a group are privileged and powerful compared to girls as a group. Examples such as, "being a girl, I will not be able to talk over a boy", and "a girl should not behave in a way that results in upset feelings in a boy" support the idea. Besides these examples, all the examples stated above illustrate that Rohingya girls are systematically denied power and influence. Consequently, they internalize the message they receive about what they are supposed to be like, and they may come to believe the message to be true (Rowlands, 1997, p. 11). This internalized oppression can be one of the most influential reasons of social domination.

The range of examples discussed above illustrate that in FDMN community power-based resources are distributed unfairly between a group of boys and a group of girls and that result in unequal distribution of power to act. Thus, unjust distribution of power-based resources between a group of boys and a group of girls legitimates conditions for 'reciprocal superordination and subordination' (Marder, 2016, p. 446) in relationships of power. Such practices of reciprocal superordination and subordination in girl-boy relations relate to the negative view of power that is likely to be associated with girls' negative emotion of sadness. Example such as "I am feeling very sad despite that there is nothing to do" represent girls' negative emotions of sadness by indicating the failure conditions for girls to achieve goals as well as by linking "girls' deficiency in personal control over their environment" (TenHouten, 2016, p. 86).

In sum, power-based resources such as normative resources, and cognitive resource create legitimate conditions for gender and power inequalities, boys' power of violence over girls, and girls' experience of negative emotion of sadness. Importantly, having these power-based resources are adequate for boys to influence girls in the FDMN community in the absence of power use. Notably, power bases constructed by varied power sources inspire boys to use power in a range of interaction pattern and thus to influence girls.

2.2. Power Use

The influence of power bases that distribute power unequally between a group of boys and a group of girls makes it possible for boys to use power by employing a range of control tactics, strategies, and interactional techniques. Examples of such strategies include 'communication of stereotypical belief or prejudice communication that supports girls' fate control and behavior control'; 'bullying to regulate girls' use of male gendered spaces and thereby to restrict girls' agency'; 'rumor spreading to influence girl-girl peer rejection'; 'making noise to resist elder sister's concern regarding the younger brother's safety and protection'; 'brother induced misbehavior on the ground that being younger than the brother the sister cannot be the winner in an indoor-game'; 'economic subordination', and 'assertiveness to win in the negotiation process in regard to bearing the expenses of none of the two wives'; 'emotional threat to suppress girls' wishes to entertain girls' family members, and to regulate girls use of public space specifically when a girl is seen sitting outside home to dry hair, and to regulate girls' interaction with other males specifically when a girl is seen sitting beside a man in a vehicle'; 'neglect of girls and children to force them to leave home that supports maintenance of boys' relations outside marriage'; and other control attempts to 'exploit girls' labor' that ultimately meets the needs of boys' everyday living.

Notably, boys use these strategies to get what boys want, however, such strategies can be described as patriarchal oppression against girls, in other words, "patriarchal terrorism" (Karakurt & Silver, 2013, p. 3) that relates to the negative view of power; and affects girls' honor, dignity, respect, and a sense of self. Because girls do not have meaningful options to escape from such negative views of power, girls experience negative emotion. In the research context, when describing oppressive behavior, most girls became upset and tearful that indicate girls' emotional pain and in-

ternal distress. In many instances, threats as emotional abuse resulted in anxiety and fear among girls. In the interview context, shaking her two hands, a girl mentioned that she always experiences the feelings of fear and anxiety thinking that “if she makes any mistake” or “if her husband marries another girl”. Besides threat, other forms of control strategies also develop fearful behavior and disgust feelings among girls in the sense of withdraw given that many girls “wish to escape, hide, or disappear from interacting with boys in order to maintain distance”. Furthermore, a girl’s facial expression and question such as, “If I were older than my brother, will the practice be continued?” indicates the girl’s anger in sibling relations. Additionally, many girls also felt ‘uncomfortable, awkward, and nervous’ because of these girls’ self-perceived discrepancy between the girls’ personal standards and how the girls are actually behaved and their damaged reputation in public and private spaces.

In sum, power bases encourage boys to use of power in the form of control attempts and strategies as they interact with girls in different social relations. Consequently, girls experience a range of negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, anger, disgust, and embarrassment. Importantly, boys’ such use of power is the foundation for power outcomes in different forms of power relations.

2.3. Power Outcomes

Given that boys demonstrate success in using power, boys make final decision regarding girls’ use of public space or male gender space, girls’ time to visit parents’ home, allocation of family resources that requires girls to bring financial support from parental home to meet the expense of girls’ treatment, and economic subordination i.e., boys’ decision concerning not to bear expenses of any of his two wives. Boy’s such decision-making shapes the process of sustaining boy’s freedom and girls’ unfreedom and thus reproduces the false mode of masculine power and feminine powerlessness and corresponding gendered selves.

Importantly, many girls experience anger due to such one-sided male dominance in decision making as a girl’s quote states, “I am saying repeatedly even though he is not listening to me. Why? I feel bad recalling [the interaction pattern] of my father’s home.” This quote also indicates that girls’ action-environment belongs to the control of boys and there is nothing to do from the girl’s side, as a result, the girl feels deeper level of sadness. A girl is specifically in fear because ‘there will be nobody to take

care of her specially when her father, who does not see in one eye, will pass away'. Girls such fear resulted from boys' decision making corresponds to girls' recognition of boys as independent. "Boys' existence as independent selves are dependent on the girls' recognition of boys as independent" (Gunnarsson, 2016, p. 7). Girls also explain the ways in which one-sided decision-making affects changes in the girls' view of themselves. A quote such as "Now I blame my fortune, it happened whatever was written in my fortune" suggests girls' false feelings of guilt resulted from depressed effects.

In sum, boys' real power to make final decisions leads to unfreedom and psychological violence of girls, consequently, girls' experiences of negative emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, and guilt interact with the level of power outcome.

Conclusion

The prevailing sexist practices in FDMN community and the corresponding different opportunities and benefits that girls and boys systematically experience divide "girls" and "boys" into two different categories and create conditions for subordination of girls on the basis of sex-based irrational differentiation. Hence, in this community, "boys' power is predetermined by gender, by being male" (Allen, 1998, p. 23), consequently, to be a girl means powerless and to be a boy means powerful. Structural inequality, gender norms and culturally defined authority, and cognitive resources play greater role in the maintenance of such systematic disadvantage of girls, disparity between boys' power and girls' subordination, and boys' violence against girls. Such power capability rooted in the contexts of power bases put boys as a group in the position to use power in extreme form as violence and successful power use underlies power outcomes that prevent girls from voicing. Importantly, negative emotions such as sadness, fear, anger, guilt, and disgust interact in different domains of power i.e., power bases, power use, and power outcomes and thus support the idea that gender, power, and emotion are intertwined.

In the FDMN community, it is also possible that not all girls are victimized and not all boys are powerful. However, given that girls are largely fated to remain victims within patriarchal relations and such code of disempowerment is highly problematic for girls' wellbeing, feminist theoretical project could be designed or expanded in this community with

the focus upon positive emotions and positive view of power i.e., power as empowerment or power as resource that defines power as “the capacity to transform and empower oneself and others” (Allen, 1998, p. 27). Future research could therefore explore interventions for adolescent girls that are aligned to the principles of such project to understand how girls, individually or collectively, can bring about reform in the dominant power structure and thus experience positive emotions.

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Nasula the Iroko in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*

ABSTRACT. Drawing insights from Resilience Theory, this paper critically analyzes the survival and coping strategies of Nasula in the face and wake of adversity in Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*. The aim is to affirm that human beings have the potential to rise above the vicissitudes of life through resilience, the obstacles notwithstanding. The paper demonstrates the strength, innovativeness and agency of Nasula in her struggle to fulfil her strong desire to send her daughter, Sula, to high school. The paper posits that hope and determination inspired by resilience equip Nasula to rise above all the traumatic circumstances that confront her to write her daughter's future through education. Her determined and resilient response to her adversity informs the metaphoric title of this paper, 'Nasula the Iroko', and Iroko in Igbo worldview stands as a metaphor for strength, mobility and resilience. All these qualities are enshrined in Nasula. The paper concludes that Nasula's resilience is an inspirational model that may strengthen the innate resilient capacities of the readers, both men and women, to rise above adversity, especially women in whose minds the patriarchal definition of the woman as a weaker vessel has been engraved.

KEYWORDS: resilience, adversity, iroko, Binwell Sinyangwe

Introduction

Binwell Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* (2000) has attracted a wealth of research. N'guessan (2018) in his Marxist Feminist reading of *A Cowrie of Hope*, argues that the novel empowers educated women to create awareness in their fellow women to see the acquisition of formal education as a necessary weapon to put off the blinkers of patriarchy. He concludes that "*A Cowrie of Hope* is therefore infused with a revolutionary project" (N'guessan, 2018, p. 19). Ngom (2020, p. 140) examines the redemptive powers of courage and ties of friendship in *A Cowrie of Hope* and posits that pain and suffering can be rolled back if people tap into virtues such as courage, friendship, and compassion. Using a motherist approach, Sotunsa, Nyamekye & Adebua (2020) investigate the positive and negative outcomes of single parenting in *A Cowrie of Hope* and submit that the neg-

ative effects of single parenting on Nasula, the protagonist, are economic hardships and emotional distress while one of the positive outcomes is the remarkable success achieved by Nasula and her daughter through hard work. They conclude that the individual's attitude towards the survival of the single-parent family determines its success or otherwise (Sotunsa et al., 2020, p. 58). Ben-Daniels (2020) employs Hudson-Weems's strand of African womanism as a framework to analyze two novels, one of which is *A Cowrie of Hope*. He posits that Sinyangwe identifies illiteracy as one of the key challenges facing the African woman and suggests the solution to this problem through the representation of Nasula, who against all odds, sends her daughter to high school so that she would have a "room and money of her own" (Ben-Daniels, 2020, p. 64). Evidently, Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* has been examined from different perspectives. This study adds to the existing literature by employing the resilience theory to critically examine the survival strategies of Nasula, the heroine, in the face and wake of adversity, which has scarcely been done. The aim is to show that human beings have the potential to rise above the vicissitudes of life through resilience, the obstacles notwithstanding.

Resilience theory has, in recent times, been employed in analyzing literary texts even though it has been used in social sciences. Resilience, according to Windle (2011, p. 12) "is the process of effectively negotiating, adapting to, or managing significant sources of stress or trauma". She argues further that "assets and resources within the individual, their life and environment facilitate this capacity for adaptation and 'bouncing back' in the face of adversity". Mlambo, Kangira and Smit (2015, p. 49) define resilience as "the capacity for strategically absorbing disturbance and challenges, and for coping with the complex uncertainties in life so as to survive and move beyond survival". To Luthar, Crossman, and Small (2015, p. 250) "resilience is a phenomenon or process reflecting relatively positive adaptation despite significant adversity or trauma". They identify adversity and positive adaptation as two distinct dimensions that are subsumed into the resilience theory. Similarly, Cloete & Mlambo (2014, p. 94) identify "coping, optimism, stress-resistance, post-traumatic growth, creativity, emotional intelligence and a survivor personality" as the main attributes of resilience. It is evident from the foregoing that "resilience theory has its roots in the study of adversity..." (Van Breda, 2018, p. 2) and adversity, according to Obradovic et al. (2012), as quoted by Yates, Tyrell & Masten (2015, p. 774) "refers to negative contexts and experiences that have the potential to disrupt or challenge adaptive functioning and development".

In sum, resilience theory interprets how people deal with adversity, its nature notwithstanding and how it makes the victims survive and thrive in the face and wake of adversity. "Analyzing literary texts through the lens of the resilience theory, therefore, means focusing on the people's survival techniques, their responsiveness in exploiting opportunities, and their capacity to prop up agency even in the worst of situations ..." (Mlambo et al., 2015, p. 49). This framework will be employed in the analysis of Nasula's survival techniques in Sinyangwe's *A Cowrie of Hope*.

Belita Bowa, the protagonist of *A Cowrie of Hope*, earns the name Nasula, soon after the birth of her daughter, Sula. Sula means "let things be" (Sinyangwe, 2000, p. 4). So Nasula becomes the mother of 'let things be'. Ironically, Nasula, by nature, fights against things that ought not to be, the consequences notwithstanding. She does not sheepishly accept things or events that work contrary to her convictions, and this turns out to be the source of her adversity. Her resilience in the midst of her adversity manifests in three dimensions: her rejection of levirate marriage, her fight to ensure Sula's schooling and her fight to recover her stolen bag of beans.

Rejection of Levirate Marriage

The novel opens with the information that Nasula has just lost her husband, Winelo Chisewebe. After the burial, she was given to Isaki Chisewebe, Winelo's brother, to inherit as his wife, which she objects: "she refused to be married to Isaki" (2000, p. 8). Her in-laws react to her subversive behavior by throwing her and her daughter out of her husband's house, "blaming her for the death of her husband" (p. 8). Meanwhile, Chisewebe, before he passed on, wrote on a piece of paper that "his house in Kalingalinga and everything in it that he was leaving behind, including the money to the sum of seven hundred and fifty thousand kwacha, should be given to his wife, Nasula, and that his parents and relatives should share only his gun, his bicycle and his clothes" (p. 9). Nasula's in-laws blatantly refuse to honor the wishes of the deceased. However, Nasula chooses to "perish with her poverty rather than accept a forced marriage and the wealth her dead husband had left her" (2000, p. 16). Her life has now come full circle and she is back where she started, in poverty, which she thought she has escaped through marriage.

Nasula was born into a destitute family. She subscribes to early marriage as a way of escaping poverty. She ruminates: "Winelo had taken her

to the city and made her used to a modern life where he gave her what material things she needed, only to die a careless death and condemn her to rags and sand because she was incapable of acquiring such things on her own..." (2000, p. 10). Evicted from her husband's house, Nasula returned to the village with her daughter after spending some nights at the bus station for want of transport fare. She reminisces:

What was the use? Was the man who was given to read the words the deceased had written even allowed to finish reading? ... How they took away everything from her except what was on her body. How they threw her out of the house and sold it, leaving her to spend nights at the bus station with the child before she found money for her travel and returned to the village ... No, she would not forget ... The way she was suffering back here in the village... (pp. 9–10).

This coheres with Moussa's observation: "in the Nigerian society, as in many other African societies, human greed exists in many families ... the in-laws could throw the widows and their children out or falsely accuse them of killing their husbands so as to acquire the late man's properties" (2020, p. 278). Nasula's resoluteness to fight against levirate marriage despoiling the wealth that would accrue to her if she accepts portrays her not only as a strong woman but also as a revolutionary who kicks against an obnoxious African tradition.

Nasula's Fight to Ensure Sula's Schooling

"But Nasula, she who was supposed to be the mother of letting things be, would not let things be over her daughter's schooling" (2000, p. 4). She is troubled on how to raise money to train her daughter who has just been admitted into grade ten at Theresa Boarding Secondary School, Kasama. She is poor and helpless "but her misfortune has not caged her soul" (p. 5):

Poverty, suffering and never having stepped into a classroom had not smoked her spirit and vision out of existence. Her humanity continued to be that which she had been born with, one replete with affection and determination. It was this which fan her desire to fight for the welfare of her daughter (p. 5).

She has not known success in her own life, "but she wanted her daughter to reach mountain peaks with her schooling and from there

carve a decent living that would make it possible for her not to depend on a man for her existence” (p. 5). She understands that education ensures a woman’s independence and freedom in a patriarchal world: “she understood the importance of education and wanted her daughter to go far with her schooling. She understood the unfairness of the life of a woman and craved for emancipation, freedom and independence in the life of her daughter. Emancipation, freedom and independence from men” (p. 5). Not only that, the agony she went through in her marriage to Winelo awakes “her to the indignities and injustices of a woman who could only put her life in the hands of a man...” (pp. 5–6). Winelo treats her like a non-human, a doll without thoughts and feelings. “He turns her into a plaything to use and to laugh at” (p. 6) because of her lack of means of livelihood. This is reminiscent of Nora’s situation in Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* (1879). In this play, Torvald Helmer, Nora’s husband, turns her into a plaything because of her total dependence on him economically and otherwise. But unlike Ibsen’s Nora who keeps silent until the denouement, Nasula on a fateful day confronts her husband: “father of Sula, let me go where you found me. You brought me here... To insult me for what you give me and do for me? ... I am poor and a woman, but you do not stop being a human being when you are poor or a woman” (2000, p. 7). Nasula’s outburst shows that she has not been infected by “the Cinderella complex defined as women’s fear of independence, one who is willing to submit herself to a strong man in control of her life” (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2017, p. 6). Nasula wants her daughter “to break up with the Cinderella myth” (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2017, p. 6) and she understands that the escape route is education. This resonates with Sosou’s position: “African women on the whole have to overcome problems of superstition, ignorance, illiteracy and physical suppression and be assisted through social education to become empowered collectively to be able to take full control of their lives and situations” (2003, p. 207).

Further, an interactive session she had with some educated women in Kalingalinga also whets her vision of higher education for her daughter. She reminisces:

She had not forgotten and she would not forget. How could she? The faces and voices of those young women of good education and good jobs in offices who came to Kalingalinga shanty compound, where she lived with Winelo, to talk to the women of the compound about the freedom of the woman. What they said about the importance of knowing how to read and write and having

a good education, what they said about the rights of a woman, and the need for a woman to stand on her own...In them she saw Sula her daughter and in Sula she saw them (Sinyangwe, 2000, p. 8).

The teaching of these educated women also makes her to reevaluate her life. She blames herself for not having a means of livelihood: "this was the price she was paying for having placed her whole life in the hands of a man, for having forgotten to hold her destiny in her own hands, even as she had been married" (p. 10). Nasula does not want her daughter to suffer this misfortune. "She did not want Sula to suffer the way she had done as an adult" (p. 12). Hence, her determination to send Sula back to school at all cost even though she is very poor:

Nasula was poverty ... Suffering was her life. She wore it like her own skin. ... Nasula had no means and no dependable support. She was the gods' plant growing on poor soils without tendrils. Both her parents had died not long after she had come of age and had left her with nothing but herself. Her late husband had left her with some money and goods, but her in-laws had swooped everything out of her possession and left her to languish with nothing in her hands, alone with her only daughter and child. She had lived like that to this day, poor, parentless, widowed and without relative to talk to and to whom she could run (2000, pp. 4-5).

Nonetheless, she is determined to raise the money for Sula's schooling "through her own sweat or by borrowing from people she would pay or work for. But these were the nineties and the nineties were very bad years. Nothing she had tried had worked" (2000, p. 19). So she decides to go to Mangano to meet her in-laws, the Chisewebes, to ask for help despising the shame. However, her daughter, Sula, registers her disapproval of this journey in a voice full of shock and pain:

Did her mother seriously believe Isaki would give her anything? Why was her mother troubling herself? The Chisewebes with their farm had money ... they were not going to part with a single coin to people they disrespected and hated as much as they disrespected and hated the two of them ... What time had the Chisewebes for them? ... If things have failed, mother, they have failed (p. 12).

Nevertheless, Nasula is not the type that will 'let things be'. She perfectly understands her daughter's fears and concerns but they could not dis-

suade her from embarking on the journey. She knows that "the Chiswebes at Mangano farm were selfish beings who loved money more than people... And they hated her for having refused to marry Isaki. But for her daughter, she would go and talk to Isaki and see if he could assist with the money for school" (pp. 12–13). She travelled to Mangano on foot due to financial constraint:

The woman walked. She walked and walked, along a meandering footpath. ... The forest on both sides was dense, full of virginity, and a still silence as uncanny as that of the land of the dead. In the ghostly womb of untampered nature, the woman walked the distance to Mangano. Alone, unescorted by man. Nasula was courage. Days had inured her to many things and had turned her into a hard wood (p. 14).

She eventually arrives at Mangano only to discover that her once powerful and wealthy in-laws have become poverty themselves devastated by AIDS. She returns home empty-handed.

Notwithstanding, Nasula will not 'let things be'. She makes more attempts to raise money for her daughter's schooling. She works for people in their farm who in return would pay her; but because of poor harvest, they are unable to keep to the agreement. Dogged in the pursuit of her dream, she decides to create her own farm. She could not however benefit from the legal loan granted by a fertilizer agent because of her poverty. So she meets Pupila, a beneficiary of this loan, to borrow some from him. He lends her two pockets of fertilizer and also half of a small-size pocket of seed maize on credit. "It was agreed that she would repay Pupila two and a half ninety kilogram bags of maize for one pocket of fertilizer, and half a bag of maize for the half pocket of seed" (2000, p. 39). This, she accepts though stringent. Mother and daughter work on the farm assiduously:

Together and alone with her daughter, she toiled and toiled. With attention to every detail of timing, application and tending her field ... But the rains were not enough. The idea had been to harvest eleven bags of maize, give five and half to Pupila, use half a bag, and keep five for selling in April, at a time when there would be serious shortage of maize, and just a month before Sula would be due to leave for school (p. 39).

Unfortunately, the harvest was poor because the rains were not enough. She harvests "only a paltry six bags of bad grain" (p. 39) and Pupi-

la, the shylock, wrests all his five and a half bags from her leaving her with only half a bag. Resilient, she resorts to doing piece work: “the people she approached to do the work for would promise her money, which she clearly stated was what she needed for her daughter’s schooling, at the time of negotiation” (p. 39) but once she is done with the work, they pay her in kind, with “things that no one could buy...an old plate, *pupwe*, a basket, a cassava or a rag” (p. 39). Undaunted, she decides to borrow some money. This also fails because “no one wanted to lend...because there was no money around, and she was too poor to be trusted” (p. 40). With unflinching courage, she went back to Pupila to strike a similar deal with him. The turnout this time was also very poor.

Nasula intimates to her friend, Nalukwi, her vision of sending Sula to high school and how all the efforts she has made to raise the money have proven futile. Nalukwi gathers in the course of their conversation that Nasula has a bag of beans in stock. So she suggests that she take the bag of beans to Kamwala market in Lusaka which will sell at one hundred thousand Kwacha, which is enough to send Sula back to school. This information rekindles Nasula’s hope and with great expectation, journeys with Nalukwi to Lusaka the following day to sell the bag of beans.

Sadly, Nasula fell prey to the hands of a young man who escaped with her bag of beans at Kamwala market. Nasula and Nalukwi moved round the whole market in search of this man. They asked around for a clue on how to get him but to no avail. They only succeeded in getting his name, Gode Silavwe. The two friends went back to Nalukwi’s house exhausted. Meanwhile, an elderly man in the market who witnessed what happened to Nasula helps her with two ten thousand *kwacha* to transport herself back to the village the following day. While at the Motor Park, dangerous thoughts begin to creep into Nasula’s mind: “she wanted to die. She had to go back to the village but she did not want to go...she did not want to leave the place which owned the death of her daughter’s future. She felt she would prefer to die than go home and be confronted by the sights of Sula” (2000, p. 97). While brooding over her misfortune, a voice in an interior monologue queries: “what is becoming of you? Wishing for your own death? Stop being foolish...just look your troubles in the eye...The world has not ended” (pp. 97–98). This rekindles her hope. She resolves: “no, she would not let herself die...What about the child? Sula, her only one. What would become of her without a mother, without anyone in the whole world?” (p. 98). She rebounds quickly from dwelling on her vulnerability.

Half way into the journey to the village, Nasula decides unswervingly to go back to Lusaka to search for the thief of her daughter's future. So she pleads with the conductor when they got to a road block to take his share of the transport fare and give her back the balance so she could go back to Lusaka. The conductor was hesitant but with the intervention of the driver, the balance was given to her. So Nasula returned to Kamwala market with a determination to catch the thief, Gode Silavwe: "she was determined...determined to fight for the welfare of her only child; to hunt for the man who had stolen her bag of beans...she desired to hunt him down" (2000, p. 112). This echoes Siebert's submission that "when resilient people have their lives disrupted ... They allow themselves to feel grief, anger, loss, and confusion when hurt and distressed, but they don't let it become a permanent feeling state. An unexpected outcome is that they not only heal, they often bounce back stronger than before" (2009, p. 5).

Nasula's Fight to Recover Her Stolen Bag of Beans

While in Kamwala market, Nasula came across an old man who remembers what happened to her the previous day. He asks her why she has not gone back to the village. She answers: "I have something to do before I can go" (2000, p. 114). The old man understanding what she meant, cuts in:

Good woman, I can see that you are troubled. But hear me well. If the man who took your beans is the reason for your not returning where you have come from, don't waste your time. You will never find him, and if you find him, you will never catch him, and if you catch him, you will never get the better of him...A man who does what that man did to an innocent woman like you is not a person to go hunting for. He will just take out a gun and shoot you, or run over you with his car (p. 114).

The old man's counsel is enough to discourage anybody but not Nasula. She "reassured herself that she would hunt for the man to the end of the world" (pp. 114–115). The old man perceiving her resolve, adds: "take my advice, go back to the village quickly. I know what I am talking about. Lusaka is a place of madness and Gode is a terror" (p. 115). She muses after thanking him:

What did it matter if Gode was death itself. The man had stolen her only hope of salvation, which lays in her daughter's schooling. She must look for him and she would pursue him to her death, if that was what he wanted. The pain of her loss called to her and she would rise to its call (p. 115).

What a woman! She is bent on treading even where men fear to tread in pursuit of her dream.

While continuing with her search, Nasula came across three young men in whom she saw something of Gode's shadow (p. 115). She draws close to them without being noticed. She hears one of them telling the others that he knows where Gode lives. Upon hearing this, she walks fearlessly to the group and asks if it is Gode Silavwe they are talking about and if they could show her where he lives. The three of them disappeared within split seconds. Soon after, a ragged man who eavesdropped on her conversation with the three young men walks to her and says: "The trouble is no one in this town will tell you anything about Gode, or where he stays or where you can find him. Not even a policeman. They fear Gode might find out and Lusaka will become too small for them" (p. 118). The ragged man also advises her to go back saying: "good lady of the soil, I am here where I stand to plead with you to go back to where you came from and not waste time looking for Gode, because nothing will come from your effort" (pp. 118–119). He tries to convince her by intimating her that Gode made away with a trailer load of beans in the past without being caught. She nods her head in frustration and "continued with her search for Gode, who was now something more of an unpleasant mystery, after what she had heard about him" (p. 119). Her body itself gives her the signal that she needs to stop: "her feet were heavy, her legs shaky and her body weak from exhaustion, hunger and thirst. She was a lump of fatigue, sweating and dusty. But she clung to her last flicker of strength and started towards the inner-city bus terminus in the north" (p. 119).

A whole week has passed without any sign of success. During this time, Nasula 'visited many parts of town: "several compounds, low- and medium-density residential areas, revisiting the places she thought were more promising as she found it necessary" (2000, p. 121). She sleeps at the inter-bus terminus at the end of each day:

She had also become very dirty, smelly, and sticky with sweat for she had not been able to wash. And she was frail and stiff that she could not move for a distance without sitting down to rest. The acceptance of defeat began to creep

over her. She could feel that her strength and will were waning. Again and again, a ghost in the wilderness of her being whispered admonitions to her, urging her to give up and go back to the village...But a power she could not overcome, which was from a bleeding heart told her not to listen to the whispers of discouragement, or give up when she had already suffered so much. It urged her on. To this power she yielded while at the same time allowing the ghost of defeat to haunt her. She struggled on, a thin, valiant, invisible thread pulling her along in the direction of nowhere (pp. 121–122).

Nasula continues with her search to the premises of Shoprite supermarket. While there, she sighted the yellow car Gode used to cart away her bag of beans. She hides behind a dustbin waiting for him to come to the car. Gode appears in no time “smartly dressed in a black suit, the familiar figure of Gode appeared with a Shoprite bag in his right hand” (2000, p. 124). She springs to her feet and confronts him boldly and the following conversation ensues:

‘Have I not found you?...You thought I would not find you, but I have found you.’
‘Who are you?...Do you know me?’
‘Do you ask me that? Are you not Gode Silavwe and am I not the woman whose bag of beans you took without paying for it...at Kamwala market?’
‘I don’t know you woman, and I have no idea what you are talking about.’
‘That’s fine, but I want my bag of beans or the money for it...’
‘What are you talking about?’
‘Don’t ask me questions whose answers you know yourself’ (pp. 124–125).

She stood in front of the car “with her arms akimbo, her eyes flaming with rage... The reality of her own frailty and the evident wealth and strength of the man, did not exist for her in the swirl of her anger and desperation” (p. 125). Ignoring her, Gode makes for his car. She challenges him: “you will not go anywhere until you give me my bag of beans or the money for it! Or you will have to kill me here and now” (p. 126). She throws herself at him “grabbing both lapels of his jacket in her hands and burying her head in his belly” (p. 126) demanding for her beans or the money for it. He pushes her away with all his strength. Nasula crashes to the ground. She gathers herself up again and rushes towards the car as she hears Gode switch on the engine. She clings firmly to the seat belt with both hands while Gode engages the engine to fly away. “One instant more, the car would have started pulling her along” (p. 127). Nasula starts screaming “Thief, thief...this man is a thief” (p. 127). This attracts the gath-

ering of a large crowd at the scene including a policeman. Nasula explains what happened to the policeman. He took two of them to the police station and handed them over to the policemen on duty to handle the case.

At the police station, Gode takes advantage of Nasula's illiteracy by speaking English with the policemen at the desk. After exchanging some pleasantries with them, one of the policemen menacingly tells her that she has no evidence to prove her case adding "I personally don't think he is the kind of man who would steal a bag of beans, and not from you. I think you are mistaken" (2000, p. 131). What an irony! The policeman releases Gode thereafter. Nasula is dumbfounded: "cold strands she could not neither see nor touch had immobilized her: they were tying her down" (p. 131). In spite of her shock and disappointment, she musters up the courage to follow the policeman and Gode out of the office and there saw Gode giving some money to the police officer. Nasula the iroko rushes back to the office complex. She runs up the stairs in search of the boss defying every attempt by the police officers to stop her until she rams into a man who happens to be the boss. Kindly enough, the boss, Samson Luhila, takes her to his office and listens attentively to her complaint. She pleads with the boss crying:

Help me, I am a poor woman of no means and with no one to turn to. My daughter will not go to school after what has happened if you don't help me. She is my only one and my future. The bag of beans was my only hope of sending her to school and securing her future and mine. My only hope for my only hope (p. 136).

The boss releases his personal car to fetch Gode immediately. Upon interrogation, Gode admits taking the bag of beans without paying for it. Luhila orders him to give to Nasula one hundred and fifty thousand *kwacha* instead of one hundred and twenty thousand *kwacha*, the original price of the bag of beans. He says to Gode: "you have troubled her a lot. Regard the way she is looking. Does it please you to see a mother looking like this?" (pp. 140-141). Nasula thanks Luhila profusely saying "you have saved me and my daughter. We are poor people with nowhere to clap a hand" (p. 144).

Nasula left the police station elated. "She walked with a sure step and buoyant heart. She felt strong and refreshed in spite of her tired, dirty, smelly, aching body with hunger eating at the walls of her stomach, and the thirst that pulled at her mouth" (p. 144). She makes her way to a shop and

bought all that Sula needs to go back to school and went back to the village the following day. Nasula escorts Sula to Senga Hill where she boards a bus to Kasawa. "...mother and daughter waved emotionally at each other and wept" (2000, p. 149). N'guessan (2018, p. 18) asserts that "the prevalence of reality observed in Sinyangwe's novel is a sign that by writing Sula's future Nasula by the same token writes the future of all the suffering and illiterate women of her generation".

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the coping strategies of Nasula to her adverse life circumstances. Cloete & Mlambo (2014, p. 94) aver that:

People react to life's challenges in many different ways. Some will emotionally explode; others might become angry; and others might become physically violent. Others may implode, go numb, feeling helpless and overwhelmed by what has happened. Some might portray themselves as victims, blaming others for what has happened. They spiral downward and harbour unhappy feelings.

Evidently, this is not the case with Sinyangwe's Nasula. She refuses to spiral downwards but holds up under pressure and bounces back not allowing negative emotions like fear and hopelessness to weaken her strong desire to send Sula back to school. Her resilience brings her utmost dream into reality. Nasula's determined and resilient response to her adversity informs the metaphoric title of the paper, 'Nasula the iroko' and Iroko tree in Igbo worldview "stands as a metaphor for strength, mobility and resilience" (Kanu, 2021, p. 99). All these qualities are enshrined in Nasula. The author, Sinyangwe himself in describing Nasula's resilience makes an inference to this: "days had inured her to many things and had turned her into a hard wood" (2000, p. 14).

All in all, Nasula embarks on a long and winding journey towards securing the future of her daughter which ends with a huge success. Her resilience is an inspirational model that may strengthen the innate resilient capacities of the readers, both men and women, to rise above adversity especially women in whose minds the patriarchal definition of the woman as a weaker vessel has been engraved.

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Helon Habila and the Trauma of Disposable People in *Oil on Water*

ABSTRACT. Trauma studies are no doubt a burgeoning area of discourse that has captured the literary imagination of academic scholars for a few decades running. This study examines the complex relationship between socio-cultural influences and intimate personal relations portrayed in trauma fiction, such as Helon Habila's *Oil on Water*. Specifically, how do these depictions in Habila's fiction direct our awareness of the catastrophic effects of war, poverty, hostage-taking, and domestic abuse on the individual psyche? How do traumatised people respond? To what extent can we theorise trauma studies and ecocritical studies? How traumatised is the physical landscape portrayed in Habila's fiction? The study concludes by insisting that governments of nations and relevant international organisations owe the people the responsibility of intentionally committing to rearticulating and rehabilitating the social conditions, voices, and, indeed, the lives of marginalised people.

KEYWORDS: trauma, war, psyche, environment, "new slaves"

Introduction

The term "trauma" has been used in many ways and has found a place in several disciplines and lexicons. Traumatic events can include physical and sexual abuse, neglect, bullying, community-based violence, disaster, terrorism, and war. Thus, we can have national Trauma, historical Trauma, psychological/emotional Trauma and ecological Trauma. The original meaning of "trauma" is wound, but when used as such, it only conveys the idea of an injury inflicted on the body. However, in the health and behavioural sciences, Trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. Unlike the body's wound, which is simple and healable, the wound of the mind is often difficult to heal. According to Cathy

Caruth, "the wound on the mind is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known and it's therefore not easily available to consciousness until it imposes itself repeatedly through nightmares." (1995, 6).

Tracing the history of Trauma, Joke Dey Mey submitted that "Trauma as a field of study goes back to the early twentieth century which is the time when Sigmund Freud developed his theory of psychoanalysis. It was Freud who changed the meaning of 'trauma' from indicating 'physical injury' to 'psychological injury.'" (34). Ruth Keys also agreed that "Freud is the founding figure in the history of the conceptualization of trauma" (18). Trauma theory started with his study of the cause of neurosis in hysterical women whose examination parallels that of French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (as cited in Bessel et al. Van Der Hart, 158). Specifically, Charcot's carried out an investigation on hysterical women, which resulted in the comparison between mental illness and Trauma but with a concentration on the exclusivity of traumatic symptoms like sudden paralysis, amnesia, sensory loss and convulsions. The study, however, maintained that these hysterical women were victims of rape, domestic violence and sexual abuse, which underlined the agonizing experiences they were subjected to.

On her part, Cathy Caruth's argument hinges on what happens to a victim as a devastating event happens so quickly that he is unable to understand it. However, after a while, this event begins to haunt the victim. This directly puts the understanding of Trauma as the immediate experience of the wounding and the belated effects of that wound, manifesting in the form of dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, and repeated actions, which are the hallmarks of trauma theory. Following this, literary works can record events in their belatedness. What Kai Erikson (1995) called "stories of wounds or blow to the tissues of the mind" (183) is what literary Trauma discusses. These stories cry out in an attempt to tell the readers of a reality that they do not have access to.

In the last twentieth century, as efforts to further understand the intricate nature of Trauma increased, the American Psychiatric Association came out with what was referred to as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) because of the related symptoms they shared with the theory of Trauma. Cathy Caruth's puts it thus:

The field of psychiatry, psychoanalysis and sociology have taken a renewed interest in the problem of trauma. In 1980, American Psychiatric Association finally acknowledged the long-recognized but frequently ignored phenome-

non under the title, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)”, which included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat stress, delayed stress syndrome, and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes (1995, 3).

The above details show the connection between PTSD and Trauma, revealing the imposition on the mind of frustrating events that are inexorably linked with Trauma. Various studies reveal that Trauma is formerly a medical term used to refer to a wound or, external bodily injury or mental injury, primarily one triggered by emotional distress, the Memory of which is subdued and remains unheard, or the state of the situation so caused. In postcolonial discourse, the common themes of trauma studies include displacement, dispossession, segregation, political violence, genocide, reparation, rehabilitation, healing, and recovery. Following this, a traumatized individual or group can afterwards experience psychological healing or material recovery. By material recovery, we refer to issues such as reparation or remediation, restitution, rehabilitation, and the transformation of a wounded political, social, and economic system.

Initially situated in the domain of medicine and then psychology, the study of Trauma has, since 1990, become relevant in literary and cultural studies. Indeed, as Trauma has become a prominent theme in life writing and fiction, its studies have emerged as a new field within the humanities. Prominent among the publications in the field since the 1990s are such works as Cathy Caruth’s essay collection, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and her monograph, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996). Several studies on Trauma in fiction, non-fiction, film, and culture subsequently followed these works. As one writer emphasized, “the growing attention devoted to trauma in academic discourses is closely intertwined with its rising recognition in general and media discourses” (Vickroy, 2). Trauma and Memory have emerged as key cultural categories and concerns. Thus, scholars like Luckhurst have identified Trauma in the light of an “exemplary conceptual knot” in contemporary networks of knowledge (14). In contrast, Anne Whitehead, on her part, identifies Trauma as a “memory boom,” diagnosing widespread “cultural obsessions” with both individual and collective Memory (*Memory*, 1–2). The concept of Trauma has expanded beyond its original disciplinary ground and crossed boundaries between various fields and discourses; thus, it has become increasingly, even notoriously, complex and slippery.

Theorists like Cathy Caruth, Donnick Lacapra, Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman employed Freud's theory as the base upon which they developed their theory on Trauma. Sigmund Freud argued for what he termed "the conscious/unconscious functioning." (YEAR, 11). Trauma, therefore, emerged following Freud's conscious/unconscious functioning—which can simply be explained to mean the immediate experience of the wounding and the belated effects of that wound in the form of dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, and repeated actions which aggravate or open up the wound. Following this, several areas of social concern, such as the recognition of the prevalence of violence against women and children (rape, battering, incest), the identification of the phenomenon of post-traumatic stress disorder, as we find in war veterans who fought in wars, the awareness of the psychic scars occasioned by the Holocaust, becomes the points of departure in conceptualizing the concept of Trauma. The scholars earlier mentioned in this paragraph argued that Trauma is an overwhelming condition which affects the psychology of people who are confronted with an injury—either bodily or psychological.

Trauma theory states that "traumatization occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with an external threat" (Van der Kolk, YEAR, 23). The way we think, learn, feel, remember, and cope with the world are affected by traumatic experiences, which affects the human brain by lessening its capacity.

What has literature got to do with Trauma? In trying to offer an answer to this question, it is important to highlight what Vickroy observed, "literary and imaginative approaches [to trauma] provide a necessary supplement to historical and psychological studies" (Trauma & Survival, 221). Literature, through imagination and forms of symbolization, provides approaches that can effectively express many extremes of human experience that often may not be correctly expressed and comprehended verbally. The fictional worlds offer trauma narratives the much-needed space where the phenomenon of Trauma can widely be explored, despite the multiplicity of perspectives any writer chooses to write from. In other words, literary texts and the fictional world in which they are created offer opportunities for nuanced engagements with the subject or theme of Trauma. This theme can be personalized, contextualized, or historicized. In addition, the synergy between literature and Trauma can produce engaging texts that can engage readers' powers of emotional identification, sympathy, and critical reflection. Worthy of note, some of these texts can serve important socio-cultural and political functions.

Following this, trauma writings, especially through the lenses of fiction, is not only “to make terrifying, alien experiences more understandable and accessible” (Vickroy, 222), but also to provide a means “of witnessing or testifying for the history and experience of historically marginalized people” (Vickroy, 222). This position was, however amplified by Ann Whiteman, who reasoned that trauma fiction often brings as a major theme “the denied, the repressed and the forgotten” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 82); thus, contemporary literary writers within and outside Africa can now explore the theme of Trauma, incorporating its structures into their writings. This linking of trauma theory and literary texts does not only shed light on works of contemporary fiction it also highlights the inherent connections between trauma theory and the literary, which have often been overlooked.

Although Trauma has been explained to mean “an incomprehensible event that defiles all representation” (Leys, 200, p. 253), many literary writers have found means of representing Trauma in fiction in a way that conveys these challenges and, at the same time, facilitates its understanding.

Ecological Trauma

What exactly is eco-trauma or ecological trauma? Since the advent of eco-criticism, there has been increased interest by scholars from different disciplines to attempt a marriage between ecology and their various interests. To this effect, we now find concepts such as eco-sahara, eco-feminism, eco-cinema, eco-linguistics and many others. Among literary scholars, eco-trauma is becoming common, especially among those with interests that revolve around trauma theory and ecology. Eco-trauma refers to the harm or devastation humans inflict on their natural surroundings and the injuries and losses they (humans) sustain from the polluted and damaged ecosystem. When there is an outbreak of war, natural disaster or death, the adverse effects affect not only human lives but non-human life also. Thus, for shell-shocked people, and rape victims, the horrors are often not immediate but afterwards. They undergo what Rob Nixon (2011) calls “slow violence” (10).

Although it occurs slowly, this ecological violence, ranging from climate change, toxic drift, deforestation, oil spills and the environmental aftermath of war, is the greatest undoing of the human race. It is not pe-

cular to any region but a global trauma. However, owing to poor governmental legislation, enforcement and perhaps remedial responses, the poor regions of the world, those helpless victims of environmental despoliation, are the worst hit. Oil spills or blowouts from oil pipelines destroy large farms and fishing settlements, and the devastating effect of the incidence on the members of that community or region is unarguably traumatic.

To further explain the concept of ecological trauma, Chris Onyema (2011) describes it as “political and environmental devastation, as well as the anguish that impacts directly on the masses as victims of political emasculation and ecological pillage.” (205). Onyema’s definition reminds us of one of the unique benefits of the synergy between literature and ecology, which is “to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world” (Love, 237). So, when there is a “disturbance” of this consciousness, trauma becomes the aftermath (Erikson, 183). Ecological trauma is often witnessed by the poor masses, the helpless and voiceless, who have been compelled to live in the midst of gross ecological pillage or in the face of open environmental devastation, even to the detriment of their health and economic well-being. In the Niger Delta region, to be precise, the game of double standards and the government’s insincerity to the people is rife. We often find it in situations where the people are kept in the dark as to the quantity of oil extracted from their soil when developmental projects that are promised some Niger Delta rural communities by either the government or oil prospecting corporations are only written on papers and never executed when oil spill and blowouts erode farmlands yet no quick intervention from the oil companies when jobs in the Niger Delta region are given to other people at the expense of qualified youths and indigenes of the region. These and many other traumatic situations are some of the woes of the Niger Delta people in Nigeria. For Cathy Caruth (1995), to be “traumatised” is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (5). She maintained further

...the traumatic symptom cannot be interpreted simply as, a distortion or reality, or as the lending of unconscious meaning to a reality it wishes to ignore, nor as the repression of what once was wished, but the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits. (5)

Put in other words, this “literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits” occurs most disturbingly within the very knowledge and experience of the traumatised. Bringing this to the situation of the Ni-

ger Delta, as the loss of their farmlands and fishing settlement to oil exploration persist, as their educated and skilled youths suffer the denial of employment opportunities, as poverty remain unabated, as infrastructures are neglected and decay owing to government's inertia, the more traumatised the people would become in the face of these social ills. In other words, ecological trauma is the consequence of years of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region which has neither translated into poverty reduction nor increased infrastructure. Sadly, oil wealth has not resulted in the reduction of unemployment for the Niger Delta people, it has not fostered the reduction of social conflicts and the ecology of the region has not fared any better.

Helon Habila and the Disposable People

Helon Habila's *Oil on Water* is a 2010 novel published by Harnish Hamilton, UK. As an ecocritical text, its preoccupation is to reveal the corruption, under-belly oil-politics endemic in the Niger Delta region; the reasons behind the continued under development of the oil-rich region and to chart a path for the speedy redemption of not just the region, but the nation's socio-economic life. And like a good work of literature, it has its own peculiarities in content, form, and structure. As Wellek and Warren would express it, "each work of literature is both general and particular; or better, possibly – is both individual and general. Like every human being, each work of literature has its individual characteristics" (7).

In *Oil on Water*, Habila tells the story of the kidnapped British woman by some group of militants in the creeks of the Niger Delta. Thus, the search for the kidnapped Mrs. Isabel Floode, her driver, Salomon as well as the "real kidnappers," becomes the point of departure for the lengthy and complicated journey embarked upon by two great journalists: Zaq and Rufus. As the journey progresses, Rufus uncovers the decay, moral degradation, ecological ruins and protracted violence prevalent in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta region in particular, following years of environmental abuse and neglect.

Using the first journey motif which featured two journalists, Zaq and Rufus as the point of departure, Habila's narrative paints a vivid picture of the trouble and the trauma of *disposable people*; a concept that was first used by Kevin Bales in his book, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (2012). As they journeyed, Rufus observed "thousands

of oil floating on the water” (Habila, 227). His observation is symbolic of the widespread pollution of land, water and air occasioned by “suspended stench of dead matter”. (Habila, 8). Even as Rufus and his team leader, Zaq proceeded in the journey despite the stench, they were further greeted by “dead bird draped over tree branches, their outstretched wings black and slick with oil; dead fish bobbed white-bellied between tree roots” (Habila, 8). With this imagery of rot and putrefaction, one can rightly judge that an already sick journalist like Zaq would be further exposed to a polluted environment, which will certainly devastate his already troubled health condition.

In describing the gravity of hazards these polluting conditions pose on the health and safety of the people, Bassey estimated that “over 100 flares sites in the Niger Delta belch 400 million tons of carbon dioxide equivalent into the atmosphere annually” (8). Beyond the polluted physical landscape, there are poor, less-advantaged people whose living condition is comparable with the deplorable environmental condition. They are the disposable people to borrow Kevin Bales’ coinage; an expression used to describe new slaves, who are not like Oluada Equaino or Friedrich Douglas; but slaves who are cheap, needing little care and are disposable.

For Bales, although slavery is considered illegal throughout the world today, yet several millions of humans are caught in the web of one of history’s oldest and ugly social institutions, known as slavery. Following accounts available from Kevin Bales’ book, the disturbing story of slavery today has confirmed a growing statistic of new slaves, also referred to as disposable people across Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia, and other parts. Bales engaged in a pathetic investigation into the conditions of “new slavery,” one intricately linked to the global economy. Three interrelated factors that have helped create the new slavery are:

- i. The enormous population explosion over the past three decades has flooded the world’s labor markets with millions of impoverished, desperate people.
- ii. The revolution of economic globalization and modernized agriculture has dispossessed poor farmers, making them and their families ready targets for enslavement.
- iii. Rapid economic change in developing countries has bred corruption and violence, destroying social rules that might once have protected the most vulnerable individuals.

Bales’ vivid case studies present actual enslaved people, slaveholders, and public officials in well-drawn historical, geographical, and cultural con-

texts. In Habila's *Oil on Water*, a ready example is Michael, the little son of man in the novel *Oil on Water*. In the dialogue where the older man makes an emotion-laden plea for Zaq and Rufus to take his son along to Port Harcourt to keep the little boy away from vices that are rife in the region, one can vividly see the desperation and the frustration that would have overwhelmed the man had his plea been declined. By closely examining Irikiefe Island and her adjoining creeks, one can glean not just the fears of this father but the disposable condition in which he had found himself. His fear of the unknown and the risk he feels having his little son, Michael, growing up in such a volatile location are manifest forms of slow violence. Through the dialogue which ensued at that scene as we have carefully extracted it, the above assertion can be substantiated with the dialogue as evidence:

Rufus: He wants us to take the boy with us when we go back to Port Harcourt. You better tell him yourself, old man.

Old Man: Yes, He no get future here. Na good boy, very sharp. He go help you and your with with any work, any work at all, and you too you go send am go school. (Habila, 36).

From the dialogue above, the older man, Tamuno, puts his son, Michael forward as a deposable person with the hope that through becoming a servant to the journalists, he could get a chance at education, which would serve as a springboard or an escape route from the unsafe and extremely poor condition the boy was born into. Hence, when the verbal appeal was not producing the expected outcome from the Port Harcourt-based reporters, the little boy, who probably had been primed or properly taught by his aged father, resorts to weeping, an extended means of appealing to pity; of course, weeping did the magic: Zaq was compelled to take the little boy, Michael along to Port Harcourt. Zaq's response to both Tamuno's appeal and Michael's tears was in the affirmative: "I will take him. I'll find a way... Now, you stop crying. Let's go" (Habila, 38).

Another category of *disposable people* that peopled Habila's fictional world, *Oil on Water*, are the numerous abductees of the many militant groups whose stock-in-trade is to kidnap oil company workers, and other categories of citizens for ransom. Many of these abductees are either re-sold or killed by their abductors when the ransom is either not paid or delayed. Their helpless situation leaves them at the mercy of these ruthless kidnappers. Isabel Flood found herself in this condition for a longer period, until she was rescued.

For the militants, therefore, this socially condemnable practice of “stealing” people for ransom, puts them forward as “new slave owners”. Additionally, the clandestine nature of their “business” makes them enemies of the law and society. In his response to the question of identifying his group, Henshaw, one of the hoodlums arrested by Major speaks of his own militant group which is different from the one headed by Professor:

- Does your group have a name?
- No! We used to have a name, but no more. That is for children and idiots. We are the people, we are the Delta, we represent the earth on which we stand.
- Are you with the Professor?
- No! I have never met the Professor. We are a different group. (Habila, 154)

The numerous militant groups and their nefarious activities pose a huge threat to lives and property in the oil-rich region. Some of them are: The Black Belt of Justice, The Free Delta Army and The AK-47 Freedom Fighters. A disturbing factor among these groups is that they are too many and “so confusing” (Habila, 31), such that family and friends of the kidnapped, together with security agencies are thrown into further trouble trying to identify “the real kidnappers” (Habila, 31).

Conclusion

Slavery is not a horror safely consigned to the past; it continues to exist throughout the world, even in developed countries like France and the United States. Across the world, enslaved people work and sweat, build, and suffer. Trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster. However, a person may experience trauma as a response to any event they find physically or emotionally threatening or harmful. Poor and less-privileged people often feel overwhelmed, helpless, shocked, or have difficulty processing their experiences. This sometimes pushes them to make themselves available as objects for the rich and well-to-do in society. In some ugly situations, these helpless members of society are reduced to carrying out some less-human, indeed dehumanising activities, which leaves them vulnerable or at the mercy of their “slave owners” or benefactors. To curb this, governments of nations and international organisations such as the UN should deploy a certain percentage of their tax or revenue generation towards providing welfare opportunities or social securities for the less privileged members of society.

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A Review of Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Gbuji*

About the Author

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo is Rundle born lecturer (Academic Rabbi). He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, Rivers State University, Nkpolu/Oroworukwo, Port Harcourt. A former lecturer at University of Port Harcourt, Department of Theatre and Film Studies. He is also a part-time lecturer with Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, at the Department of Theatre and Film Studies. He is a practicing Christian. He has held many posts and chaired committees both as an ASUU unionist and an academic staff of university.

As a playwright, he has over fifty unpublished plays. Some drafts of his plays include *Suffering in Paradise*, *"A Tale of Nine Months"*, *"The Last Resort"*, *Apogee*, *"Shan Inna"*, *"Shame in His Glory"*, *"Jane in Crisis"*, *"The Bouncer from Igodomigodo"*, *"Kaposi in Sacoma"*, *"The State's Cake"*, *"Untimely Death"*, *"The Last Don"*, *"Ele Gbaka"*, *"Rinya Chiokike"*, etc. *Gbuji* was produced on the occasion of ASUU NEC held in UNIPORT in June 2018. Some of his plays has equally been produced for the UNIPORT audience. *"Shan Inna"* (A stage play on poliomyelitis) was read via zoom to commemorate the World Polio Day, 2020. One of his articles was classified as one of the 700 articles of the year by <http://noussommesfans.com/2019/01/06/articlesmemoires-et-theses-de-lannee-2018-la-liste/f> [access: 10 August 2023] a studies et culture populaire in Paris, France. He is married to Mrs Precious Uchechi Azunwo, who also is a lecturer. Their union is blessed with a son, Jehu Chimezumenah.

Storyline

The play *Gbuji* is an exciting drama preoccupied with the conflicts surrounding ASUU, university students, parents, stakeholders and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). In the wake of the plot, ASUU declared a total, indefinite and comprehensive strike and to hearing of the students, especially those who are already at the verge of graduating, conflict in-vigorates. These disgruntled students take no time to go face to face with the ASUU representatives (ASUU Chairman, Professor Festus and Professor Andrew). The incidental meeting ignites a clash of words between the students and the ASUU. While the students continue to launch accusations and blame at ASUU over incessant strikes, the ASUU reps present would not stop playing defensively. Such an intensive display of sentiments forces the ASUU Chairperson to reveal certain details about the history/development of ASUU, her aims and achievements since her inception. Despite this effort, the dissatisfied students remain in doubt about the claims melted by the ASUU reps, thus pressing more charges against them.

Their argument lingered and ended inconclusively as the disagreeing parties agreed to resolve their differences via the President's moderation. The President of the country is around the school vicinity with his entourage for a commissioning programme, ASUU reps, students, parents and stakeholders grab the opportunity and made their way to the venue. And although, they are lightly welcomed, the President grants them the opportunity to air their worries and in no time, each group made their points. In conclusion, the President reprimands each group for their faults and resolves the conflict by inaugurating a financial programme, adopting a member from each group as part of the committee while he heads the committee. The financial programme is aimed at addressing the issues degrading university education in the country and in the end, everybody seems fairly treated and happy.

Plot Analysis

Gbuji is crafted dramatically following Gustav Freytag's plot model. The plot, therefore, has a beginning, a middle and an end, with each of the parts sequentially representing an exposition, a climax and a resolution. The plot is also a climactic plot. This claim is exacted with the following reasons;

- The play's plot runs in a very limited time frame (in this case, within 24 hours).
- Only a few characters carry the story. Thus, even though, there are plenty of extras and crowd scenarios, the mobility of the plot is on the shoulders of only a few characters (less than ten in number).
- The locale is very limited too (in this case, the locale is as restricted as only the university community).

Granted the foregoing details, the plot is also a homely one because it obeys strictly the three unities of; time, place and action.

Plot Narration

Opening sharply with a protest, the dramatic exposition begins. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) is having a congress somewhere in the University community with a prime motive of staging a total, indefinite and comprehensive strike. Meanwhile in reaction, some disgruntled students of Nigerian University have had it at the throat of their neck over the incessant strike actions carried out by ASUU. Therefore, they sought a revolutionary action and the nearest resort was a protest match. This emergency rally engages the students in their numbers, led by the student union government (SUG) president, as they sing their solidarity song, matching fearlessly to face the leaders of ASUU. In no time, the students find themselves face to face with the ASUU chairman and two rudimentary ASUU stakeholders: Professor Festus and Professor Andrew.

Following a very weak and unfriendly welcoming and receiving of each other, the students and the ASUU representative begin to dialogue. This lengthy discussion puts the sharp-articulated ASUU president and his two subordinates in a defensive position against the high-pressing students who are prepared to unleash their discontent against the industrial body. The students are of the plain opinion that ASUU is in the habit of embarking on strikes in an incessant frequency and that most of these strikes are poorly motivated and are for the selfish interest of her members. In reaction, ASUU, through her leading speaker (ASUU President) makes a frantic effort to defend the union by educating the disenchanting students. This attempt makes three basic points, the first highlights the information on the establishment of ASUU and her objectives, and the second informs that ASUU constantly go on strikes because of the Federal Government of Nigeria's (FGN) constant refusal to honour agreements it freely entered with

the union and finally, the achievements of ASUU which are relevant to the development of university education in Nigeria and not restricted to ASUU members alone.

However, despite the systematic attempt to put ASUU in a transparent landscape, the already harmed students still find reasons to fault ASUU and her members. This scenario is, however resolved with the informing by ASUU President that the President of the country is around the university vicinity for a project commissioning. The latter also makes a useful suggestion that they should all go to the President's location and tender their complaints to him. At the acceptance of this suggestion, both students and the ASUU representatives present march towards the President's location singing the solidarity song all along.

Upon their arrival at the commissioning ground, the restless students and the struggling ASUU reps are followed by an unhappy crowd of parents and stakeholders who are also seeking answers to the question of ASUU strikes. Approaching the forestage, the President's entourages (NUC Secretary, Minister for Education, Labour and Productivity and Minister of Finance) feeling shocked and embarrassed at the manner these uninvited groups of people show up at the commissioning ceremony, find the motivation to authoritatively chase them away with the presence of some armed police men. Intercepted by the interested President, they are instead put to a halt. The President, therefore ensures that all the groups are let in as he listens to them. After identifying the different groups, the discussion begins with the fore-speech of the ASUU president who expresses in details some of the worries of ASUU. In support, Professor Festus and Professor Andrew also invested some points. Accusingly, parents and stakeholders lash at ASUU for always striking, stating the direct impacts of ASUU strikes on them. And in support, the SUG president, speaking on behalf of the students also indicts ASUU further, stating the likelihood how ASUU strikes frustrates and devastates their university program.

The President's entourages (NUC President, Minister for Finance, and Minister for Education et al.) also paints ASUU black with the fore-claim that her members are lazy, academically unproductive, selfish and corrupt. The strong position of these government officials engineers a quarrel between ASUU and them. Despite the heated dialogue, the calm President, who has been listening quietly since the discussion, now takes a resolute position which is, in the end, favourable to all available stakeholders. He cautioned everyone for their mistakes and inaugurated a financial policy for developing university education with the hope that strikes will one day

cease to exist. The plot is, at this instance, resolved as everyone present rises and sings the solidarity song together.

Thematic Thrust

Theme refers to the central idea or message a work of art sustains. A work can have more than one theme (hence, subthemes). In any case, however, themes are reoccurring motifs spotlighted in a work.

Granted the foregoing, the central idea in Azunwo's *Gbuji* is the 'Rot and decay of university education in Nigeria'. And although the play is bodily preoccupied with the dealings of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), the basic idea floating in the background of the entire drama is the expression of the failed university system in Nigeria. To credit this point, the first thing to consider is the question of, "why ASUU always go on strikes?" In quick response, it suffices to make a necessary reminder that the Nigerian university system is generally ranked poor, with facilities in shambolic condition, whereas understaffing, underfunding and corruption stand behind the bane. As such, everybody is, in one way or another, affected. Thus, staff, students, management, parents and the general public are all badly touched because of the failing state of the educational sector.

Citing the world university ranking, it is on record that no Nigerian university today can boast of a place amongst the first five thousand universities globally. As a matter of fact, wealthy Nigerians who understand the place of education and are zealous about academic pursuit, make a fast step to fly their children abroad to be serviced academically in classy institutions. This is a support line to the affirmation that tertiary education in Nigeria is in its worst state. The realisation of this very fact is exactly what ASUU is interested in, thus the formation of the union since 1978.

Premised on the foregoing backdrop, the first idea established here is that, ASUU is formed as a result of the botched university education in Nigeria. Hence, the initial position that the thematic essence of the play under scrutiny is the 'Rot and decay of university education'. ASUU is reacting to this reality not particularly because teaching staff members are understaffed, underpaid, poorly equipped and/or poorly treated but because university education is falling and everybody is feeling the impact, including the larger society. ASUU is, therefore an organised setup existing functionally as a revolutionary body fighting to revive tertiary education in Nigeria.

In a related interest, it is on course to state that the students are usually desperate about graduating from the university, still, at the back of their minds, they hope that they studied in better institutions where there are better laboratories-well equipped, proper classrooms with suiting fittings, and advance approaches to teaching. The students express this very idea in the play on a number of occasions. A handy example comes from the words of the SUG president when he asked the ASUU Chairman, “which of the items listed here affects the student directly?” This question implies that the SUG President might be egocentric; hence, as the ASUU Chairman presents issues pertaining to the union, the SUG President wonders how what he is saying affects the students. This directly implies that the students also have their own peculiar worries affecting them. These worries all contribute to the falling state of university education in Nigeria. In the same vein, the complaints and worries of the parents and stakeholders all boils down to the failing state of university education in Nigeria. Therefore, in a final note, all the conflicts in the drama is ironically staged against the rot and decay of university education in Nigeria. In the first instance, if things were every day about Nigerian university education, there would not be a need for ASUU and her constant agitations (industrial actions). Students, on the other hand, would not have had any need to protest against ASUU and the Federal Government would not have been constantly troubled about issues of this sort.

Societal Relevance

In the first instance, every literary work is materially driven from the society and so in return, is mandated to give back positively to the society. Hence, apart from the fact that Gbuji is an entertaining piece of art, it informs, educates and edifies its audience. Specifically, the topic treated in the work is ideally topical and relevant to this dispensation. Education is, as a matter of fact the bedrock of development in any nation. That is exactly why when an onlooker goes through the world map today, checking through to find grade A or grade B nations, he/she will discover that such high-ranked countries have a superb and standardised educational system. Hence, there is a symbiotic relationship between a standard educational setup and a developed society.

This very idea appears to be the principal message Azunwo aims at informing the audience with Gbuji. This very relevant interest is support-

ed with the fact that the play also attempts to create a balanced equation about ASUU. It has already been established that ASUU has been most times misinterpreted, misconceived and misjudged by a lot of people, especially because of her incessant strikes. This piece is, therefore relevant because one of its prime motives is to clarify those erroneous packages propagated about ASUU. More so, the play is relevant and in fact, a crucial innovation owing to the fact that it attempts to administer resolution to a social crisis. Hence, the recommendation that adequate funding will go a long way in addressing the challenges facing university education in Nigeria. Meanwhile, as regards the disharmony between ASUU, FGN and university students, the play offers an interventionist strategy to arrest the conflict. Finally, all these attempts are envisioned to advance social peace and development.

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