

Gender Portrayal as Contingent Ideological System: A Case of Selected Igbo Novels

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Abstract

Several scholars on gender studies argue that its portrayal in literature is dependent on certain ideological beliefs in every social organization. The traditional Igbo society is patriarchal in nature. Patriarchy promotes the idea that men are more privileged, than women, in social organization. This paper examines the ideological systems which inform the gender portrayal in selected Igbo novels by male authors: Tagbo Nzeako's *Nkọli*, Tony Ubesie's *Isi Akwụ Dara N'ala*, and these written by women :Ada Meniru's *Nwaeze*, Nkeiru Kammelu's *Makụachukwu*. These novels reveal the ideological factors which necessitate unbalance portrayal of the male and female genders. Womanism, a strand of Feminism, is employed to guide the analysis. The womanists acknowledge gender differences and certain ideological tenets that subject women, and propose different ways women can co-exist with men in order to liberate themselves from the ideological shackles, without distortion of the family life. The novels reveal that the construction of the images of men and women are based on patriarchal and domestic ideologies. The paper submits that all forms of ideological tenets which encourage gender inequality and lop-sided portrayal of the male and female genders must be challenged and opts for a deliberate, sensitive, consistent, systematic approach of gender relations.

Keywords: *gender, portrayal, ideology, Igbo novel, womanism.*

Introduction

The issue of gender has become a matter of popular concern especially on issues relating to gender stereotypes and identity. Gender is a major way that society is categorized. From antiquity, human beings are classified into male and female genders. The two genders engage in different aspects of social life. Each male or female gender has roles and functions to fulfill individually, inter-individually and socially, which is where the differences begin (Assagioli and Servan-Schreiber, 1977).

The differences created by gender destine women for an entirely different social life from men. It encourages male gender to view their interests differently from that of the female and thereby promoting male superiority and female inferiority in a patriarchal society. It is important to note that the way men and women are treated in childhood stage affects their socialization in life. In the family, parents relate to girls as fragile, they are usually guarded and decorated while boys are treated as self-reliant, physically strong, active, even 'tough' and not very emotional. Boys undoubtedly internalize these messages and later see girls as innately less well physically co-coordinated and weaker beings. Therefore, women are seen as the weaker sex because of their anatomy and thereby assigned functions suitable for the weaker sex. It is obvious that individuals are born male or female and that they possess biological or physiological differences which are referred to as 'natural' or 'physical' differences, but they should not constitute the basis of their differential treatment (Bammeke, 1998:75).

Sex-based differences is so pervasive that it has affected almost all areas of social life to the extent that all segments of the society including the International World are constantly arguing that there are differences between the sexes, where men enjoy powerful positions and women subordinate status. The word of Crawford and Unger (2004), confirm that sex is an ascribed characteristic which conveys status and power; where "maleness" is

associated with greater power, prestige, and social value than “femaleness”(p. 69). Crawford and Unger (2004) also posit that sex is a determinant of social power and status where a male gender engages in behaviour that conveys high social power, whereas female gender’s behaviour conveys lower status and power. This is evident in our social system where the interpersonal processes involving gender help to maintain a pattern of male dominance and female subjection. The Family is a major center for practising and promoting gender disparity.

In a typical Igbo society, there are socio-cultural roles ascribed to men, women, boys and girls in the family. The chores such as hewing of wood, tapping of wine, harvesting of palm fruits, cultivation of yam and bread-winning are exclusive roles for males. Conversely, chores like cooking, washing, baby-sitting, sweeping and other home management activities are exclusive female roles. However, some roles are unisex; they include fetching of water, laundering, petty trading, crafts and running errands. The roles assigned to men and women as enumerated above encourage gender discriminatory practices between the male and female set. This is evident in the roles performed by males as family heads (those who have authority over everything, especially over women as wives, mothers, daughters and sisters) and the females’ roles as wives, cooks, and mothers (Onuegbu, 2004). The power and control men have over women force women to maintain the maternal position assigned to their biology (Lips, 1997).

The cultural roles assigned to male and female contribute to the behavioural patterns they exhibit in the Igbo society. Men, as household authorities and family heads, display superior, possessive, aggressive, and rational behaviour, while women, as wives and mothers, display emotional, caring and submissive behaviour (Crawford and Unger, 2004; Ikonne, 2008). Most men and women in traditional Igbo society freely, happily and strictly accept their positions because they see their roles as natural and ordained. In view of this, mothers socialise their daughters to take up their roles and teach them to be passive, docile, submissive and domestic whereas sons identify with their fathers roles to achieve their manhood and the power that goes with it. As such the boys take on aggressiveness and other symbols of male identity (Garrett, 1987). The trend is transferred from one generation to another. The women in Igbo traditional society could not challenge the cultural limitations which they experience in different forms, especially in the family, society, economy, polity and literature. Even when some women perform roles traditionally ascribed to men such as bread-winning, they are still not recognised in Igbo society. Consequently, gender-based description is unbalanced against the female. This development is of serious concern to many scholars, especially women, who observe through literature that the society is engaged in differentiating males from females (Hawthorn, 2005).

Many scholars have argued that certain ideologies in a social organisation affect the way women are portrayed in creative writing (Sudarkasa, 2005; Akorede, 2011). Emenanjo (1982) posits that the creative Igbo literary artist represents an individual mind, mentality and ethos (in the milieu of his time and place) and style of representation. According to Emenanjo, a novel is “a living world; in some respects resembling the world we live in but with an individuality of its own” (p. 42). Emenanjo further expresses that “the writer uses his/her imagination to apprehend reality in such a way as to present us with a new vision of his/her experience” (p. 42). Igbo writers draw their materials from Igbo traditional society to present the socio-cultural experiences of Igbo people and their beliefs about gender. The paper examines ideology behind gender portrayal in the selected Igbo novels by male and female authors.

Concept of Gender

The distinction between the terms *sex* and *gender* was developed in the early wave of contemporary feminist research to separate the biological (sex) and the social (gender) (Wodak, 1997). The polarity of gender in society and indeed in literature influenced much of feminist discourse in the past and even in the present times. The modern feminist meanings of gender are based on Simon de Beauvoir's insight that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman' (Moi, 1999). Simon de Beauvoir's words indicate that one becomes a man or woman through the indoctrination of behaviour and attitudes appropriate for their sex.

The creation of gender by society stems from a society's values, beliefs, and its preferred ways of organizing life (Wood, 1994, p. 21). Therefore, gender is a social construct; this implies that individuals in a typical society are gendered according to the cultural preoccupations of that society. Rothenberg (1995:41) affirms that, people are gendered not because of their physiology or hormones but from the exigencies of the social order. In every society, according to Rothenberg, there are two distinguishable genders because the society is built on two classes of people, 'women' and 'men'. To him, "once the gender category is given, the attributes of the person are also gendered: Whatever a 'woman' is has to be 'female' and whatever a 'man' is has to be 'male'" (p. 41). In this case, every individual sex is always already gendered, in that once a person is born he or she acquires gender roles suitable for his or her sex. In other words, gender identity is fixed before a person is aware of his/her genital differences (Garrett, 1987, p. 25). The fixed gender identity is reinforced by parents who see gender roles as natural or God-given. But, Ward (1996: 49) argues that "gender roles are not fixed, rigid, or defined at all times.... sex roles are neither divinely assigned nor inherent in something called 'nature'." Wodak (1997) also buttresses this point by saying that:

Gender is 'not... a pool of attributes "possessed" by a person, but... something a person "does"... 'What it means to be a woman or to be a man also changes from one generation to the next and ... varies between different racialized, ethnic and religious groups, as well as for members of different social classes' (p. 13).

From Wodak's standpoint, gender is not biological or physiological but what one performs. Since gender is what one does, which could change at any point in time, gender then, cannot be taken as a fixed identity; rather, it is flexible. But every society, including the Igbo, delineates gender on the basis of fixed identity (sex). As a result of this, every culture prescribes their gender roles according to their precepts. The cultural roles for each gender are mostly seen in every social institution, such as family, religion, community, polity, education, as well as literature.

Ideology

Ideology is a multifaceted concept in so far as it describes a system of beliefs, norms, values, ideas which attempts to explain reality. Different types of ideologies are defined by the type of groups that 'have an ideology, such as professions, churches, social movements, political parties among others. Ideologies are fundamental social beliefs of a rather general and abstract nature. Sometimes it is the case that ideologies become so widely accepted in any given society such that its traits become generally accepted attitudes of the

entire community as obvious beliefs, or opinion, or common sense. Many forms of gender inequality were and are ideological beliefs of the feminist or social movements. Interestingly, beliefs lose their ideological nature as soon as they become part of the common ground. Ideologies are not personal beliefs of individual people, ideologies are not necessarily negative, they are not some kind of ‘false consciousness’; they are not necessarily dominant, but may also define resistance and opposition.

Again, ideologies are not the same as discourses or other social practices that express, reproduce or enact them. They are also not the same as any other socially shared beliefs or belief systems. Ideologies have several cognitive and social functions. Given the goals and interests of groups as a whole, ideologies allow members to organise and coordinate their (joint) actions and interactions. Secondly, they organise and ground the social representation shared by the members of (ideological groups). Thirdly, they are the ultimate basis of the discourses and other social practices of the members of social groups as a whole. Fourthly, they function as part of the sociocognitive interface between social structures of the groups on one hand, and their discourses and other social practices on the other hand. Viewed from this perspective therefore, it is clear that some ideologies may function to legitimate domination, but also to articulate resistance in relationships of power. A good example is the issue of feminist or pacifist ideologies. Yet, other ideologies may function as the basis of the guidelines of professional behaviour. Thus, ideologies tend to be action-guiding in as much as they influence people’s behaviour.

Though the word ‘ideology’ is most often found in political discourse, there are many different kinds of ideologies: political, social, epistemological, ethical, etc. For Mullins (1972), an ideology is comprised of four basic characteristics:

- It must have power over cognition.
- It must be capable of guiding one’s evaluation.
- It must provide guidance towards action.
- It must be logically coherent.

Louis (1972) suggests that ideology is “a representation of the imaginary relation of individuals to the real condition of existence”. Furthermore, Althusser notes that ideology creates us as persons: it “hails” us, calls us into being.

On a realistic note, Manning (1974) views ideology as ideational. He says that ideology functions for the group, serves their goals and objectives. Kolawoski (1979) relates the function of ideology to the consolidation of belief, and recognises ideology as encoding interpretations, expressing, evaluating the values, views and beliefs of any social group. Hamilton (1984) on his part, defines ideology as a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and social relationships and arrangements, and are aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct which its proponents seek to promote, realize or pursue or maintain. According to Hogan (1990: 28), ideology comprises common sets of (false) beliefs and/or aims (including interests, preferences, desires, etc.) which function to promote and secure privileges for certain individuals or groups over other individuals or groups. In this way, ideology functions to discourage behaviours conducive toward the establishment of a kingdom of ends. Therbon (1980) observes that power and ideology go hand in hand as they feature prominently in every relationship, including male-female association. Minar (1961) describes six different ways in which the word ideology has been used:

- As a collection of certain ideas with certain kinds of content, usually normative.
- As the form or internal logical structures that ideas have within a set.
- By the role in which ideas play in human-social interaction.
- By the role that ideas play in the structure of an organisation.
- As meaning, whose purpose is persuasion; and
- As the locus of social interaction, possibly.

However, Ideology which is considered as preconceived notions, perceptions, ideas or images, which have pervaded the consciousness of the society over time, is seen in literature. Ideology largely promotes certain beliefs and images about gender, especially the female gender. These popularly held notions and images cast women in a strait-jacket. This is because, according to Oyewumi (2003: 27), “literally, the image not only makes the woman; the image becomes the woman.”

Feminists argue that patriarchal and domestic ideologies are the most basic cause of lop-sided portrayal of gender in literature. Johnson (2005) views patriarchy as a code for “men”. According to Johnson, patriarchy is not simply another way of saying ‘men’, but a kind of society in which men and women participate. In Johnson’s (2005) view, “a society is patriarchal to the degree that it promotes male privilege by being male dominated, male identified and male centered” (p. 5).

Furthermore, Johnson explains that patriarchy is rooted in some natural order of things, reflecting "essential" differences between women and men based on biology or genetics. Men appear to be physically stronger than women, for example, which might explain their dominance. Male dominance promotes the idea that men are superior to women. Patriarchy therefore, refers to ‘men’ and rule by men over women because of their superiority. This appears so much in the natural order of creation and has been cited repeatedly to justify unequal power relations between men and women generally. Patriarchal ideology is therefore a belief system that men are more privileged, than women, in social organization. The men in patriarchal Igbo society are the ‘head’ of women and as such, themen are bestowed with power, authority and dominion over their wives and children.

The power and authority of men to control the members of his family is evident in the Igbo family structure where men play a central role as family heads, decision-makers and controllers of women. Ogbalu (n. d.) points out that, in Igbo family, “The head of the family has enormous powers. He must be consulted in all matters involving any member of the family.... In many places, he literally has the ‘power of life and death’ over his family....” (p. 11)

Therefore, the men in Igbo family structure are regarded as ‘semi-gods’, on whom everybody in the family depends for their sustenance. Consequently, the power and authority of men are evident in the selected early and later post-war Igbo novels, especially in the early ones, where men are portrayed as heads of the family, decision-makers and controllers of women. Men are shown as the fulcrum around which the family revolves.

Domestic ideology is the belief that women's place is solely in the household, at the centre of the family, from which point they provided a kind of moral protection over public man in his competitive sphere, freeing him from the contaminating influences of the amoral marketplace (Johnston, 2001, p. 1). According to Garret (1987), parents distinguished between the kinds of household chores for the boys and girls at their young age. The girls’ work was washing up, bed-making, and laying the table and boys’ work was emptying the

rubbish, ashtrays, and waste baskets. Girls are also taught how to cook, serve the food and take care of themselves, their young ones and their environment. Parents, in this situation, are unconscious of the fact that different treatment given to the male and female children might bring gender-typed behaviour in children. And that these children will visualize different gender behaviour in the family as 'natural' rather than as the product of learning. In traditional Igbo society, women are socialized in domestic spheres of life, while men are in public spheres. Tasks such as cooking food, cleaning house, fetching water, washing clothes, plates, etc., sweeping house and environment and taking care of the younger ones, including male children, are often thought of as "woman's work" to be performed in domestic environments. Emecheta (2008) further explains that in most African societies:

the girl-child...at a very early age is conditioned from childhood into thinking that being the girl she must do all the housework, help her mother to cook, clean, fetch water and look after her younger brothers and sisters. If she moans or shows signs of not wanting to do any of these, she will be sharply reminded by her mother. 'But you are a girl! Going to be a woman'. (p. 556)

In Igbo society, domestic roles of women are strictly maintained in such a way that any alteration would attract negative criticisms. The selected early and later post-war male and female Igbo writers through their styles, scenes and characters propagate domestic ideology of Igbo society.

Theoretical Framework

The study considers Ogunjipe-Leslie's and Ezeigbo's Womanist theories appropriate for this study. This is because the womanist theories express the concern of Igbo women as portrayed in the selected early and later Igbo novels written by male and female authors. The theory of womanism was proposed by African women due to Feminists' ignorance of African cultural peculiarity. The white feminists universalized women's oppression from their own experiences and life situations, neglecting African women's identities and experiences in their struggle for women's liberation. The proponents of Feminism view patriarchy (chauvinism) as being the cause of real or perceived oppressive ideals against women. Hence, feminists view patriarchy as main source of women's oppression. As a result, Radical feminists make radical demands to eliminate male control over women in order to liberate women. Ann Oakley (cited in Raza, 1986), a radical feminist, proposes the following steps which must be taken to liberate women:

First, the housewife role must be abolished. Oakley rejects less radical solutions such as payment for housework, which, she argues, will simply reinforce the woman equals housewife equation. Second, the family as it now stands must be abolished. This proposal follows from the first since the housewife and mother roles are part and parcel of the same thing. Abolishing the family will also serve to break the circle of daughter learning her role from mother, son learning his role from father. Third, the sexual division of labour must be eradicated in all areas of social life. Oakley argues that, we need an ideological revolution, a revolution in the ideology of gender roles current in our culture, a revolution in concepts of gender identity'. Thus, men and women must be seen as people, not as gender (p. 129).

In effect, western women want to liberate themselves from the shackles of domesticity and to take an equal share in determining their future. They are increasingly concerned about

their own rights and futures, and decreasingly concerned about the future of the family. African-American women reject the radical feminists' abolition of family life as solution to sexist oppression. The African women view the separation from the men, which the white feminists advocated in order to be free from patriarchal, as absurd. African women embrace womanism to help them express themselves as African women. Womanism advocates the integration of men into the struggle rather than separation which radical Feminism proposes (Iweriebor, 1998). The African women want togetherness and closer connection with men through love and shared struggle for survival and for productive quality of life (e.g. "wholeness") in economics, religion, politics, and education.

Ogundipe-Leslie's *Stiwanism* (1994), ('STIWA' is an acronym for Social Transformations Including Women in Africa), which confronts the issue of gender relations within the family, reveals the family as a site for social transformation. She asserts the need to reveal the changing roles of women in contemporary society, particularly at the level of family. She acknowledges that indigenous African settings have gender roles strictly for men and women, and that these roles have undergone some changes in the modern society which must be accounted for. Women have taken responsibilities in the families traditionally ascribed to men; a new development Ogundipe thinks will help women to achieve liberation. She believes in women participating alongside their men in the well-being of the family. By this, they will achieve independence and equality with men. Consequently, she warns that African women,

must cease to want to exploit men financially or to burden the men within the family while talking about equality. African women need to educate themselves about the rights and responsibilities... in a modern nation-state for the woman as an independent individual and not as a dependent. (p. 210)

Women taking responsibilities in their families will help in liberating them from the male-dominated social order. Ogundipe's idea of equality with men is to encourage women to accept responsibility, especially financial responsibility alongside their men in the family. She believes that if women could do this, no African man will object to including women in the social transformation of Africa.

On the other hand, Ezeigbo's *Snail Sense Feminism* (2012) proposes the indigenous strategies women used and can still use to protect themselves and negotiate around the rugged terrain of patriarchy with its restrictions and subjugations. Women in African cultures often adopt a conciliatory or cooperative attitude towards men. This is akin to what the snail does with the environment in which it moves and exists. The Igbo people say, "ire oma ka ejule ji aga n'ogwu" (The snail crawls over thorns with a fine and well-lubricated tongue).

Moreover, the snail carries its house (shell) on its back without feeling the strain. It goes wherever it wishes in this manner and arrives at its destination intact. If danger looms, it withdraws into its shell and is safe. Ezeigbo shows that this snail-sense strategy is what women often use in our society to survive in Nigerian's harsh patriarchal culture. It is this tendency to accommodate or tolerate the male and cooperate with men that informs her theory of "Snail-Sense Feminism". Ezeigbo confirms that the Nigerian woman adopts snail-sense strategy in her relationship with men, just as the woman of the past (the indigenous woman) did in her interactions with people in her community. Ezeigbo also points out that *negotiation* or *dialogue* is sometimes more efficacious in achieving success

in human relations than aggression or confrontation. The emphasis is on the ability of the snail to smoothen rough spaces to enable it to make its movement easy. In like manner, the Nigerian woman, especially the Igbo woman, ought to be wise, sensitive and proactive in her quest for justice and self-actualisation. She further stresses that the African woman should employ subtle means (negotiation) to tackle issues concerning men than aggressiveness. This will help promote dignity and respect for womanhood and also enhance the portrayal of women in literature. A womanist will ensure peace and harmony in the family (not antagonism which brings about separation) by being “committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female.

The womanist theories which reveal the realities of indogenous and contemporary African women as portrayed in the selected Igbo novels would aid in the analysis of the ideologies that inform gender portrayal in the texts.

Analysis of Ideologies which inform Gender Portrayal in Selected Igbo Novels by male and female authors

There are certain ideologies which inform the pattern of gender portrayal in the selected Igbo novels. Literature, including Igbo, has always played and continues to play, an important role in communicating ideas or beliefs about social order through the presentation of male and female characters. The themes and styles the selected male and female writers employ in their texts function as a portrayal of the ideological systems about gender in Igbo society.

We shall consider the role patriarchal and domestic ideologies play in perpetuating positive or negative portrayal of the male and female genders in the selected male and female-authored Igbo novels, Nzeako’s *Nkọlị*, Ubesie’s *Isi Akwụ Dara N’ala* and Meniru’s *Nwaeze*, Kammelu’s *Makwachukwu* respectively.

Patriarchal Ideology

Nzeako’s *Nkọlị* shows men as the ‘lord’ and ‘master’ in the family. In his novel, women especially wives, do not address their husbands without using the term, “*nna anyị*” (our father). Ogechi, in this novel, more often than not uses the afore-mentioned phrases to address Ojeuga (her husband) whenever she wants to talk to him, as shown below: “*Bikonnaanyi, agara m ahịataata, wee loghachin’oge Di m, bikookwuhunwanyị ahụ gwara m wee gbagwojuo m anya.*” (p. 12) (Please our father, I went to the market today and came back early.... Please, my husband, I was confused by what the woman told me). It is obvious that the reason why the wives were made to use the term ‘nnaanyi’ (our father) to address men is to subtly admit that they (women) are not in the same category as men and therefore they need to respect and honour them (men). Sail-sense mechanism is all about women exploiting their submissiveness to their own advantage. As we said earlier, women should be submissive and, at the same time, negotiate towards their liberation as Ogechi did.

Nzeako describes men’s superior position as the head of the family through the residential structure of the traditional Igbo society. Nzeako’s novel reveals that in the traditional Igbo home, the “*Obi*” the family’s main house is primarily a man’s domain while the woman, that is, his wife, stays in another house called “*Mkpuké*” but all are within the same compound. “*Mkpuké*” is usually built behind a man’s “*Obi*”. This is the practice in pre-colonial Igbo society. The term “*Obi*” in this sense symbolizes higher status than

“Mkpuke”. As a rule, wives do not share the “Obi” with their husbands and vice-versa. However, a woman goes to the man’s “Obi” whenever she desires to discuss any important issue with the husband after which she goes back to her “Mkpuke”. Ojeuga (Ogechi’s husband) shows this in his words to Ogechi: “N’okwu ahụ i kwuru, akụkọ ahụ nile dị m ka ọ bụ nrọ. E-m, ihe bụ uche m n’ ime ya bụ na ị ga-alaghachi n’ụlọ mkpuke gi.” (p. 13) (What you said seems like a dream to me. Well, what I think is that you should go back to your hut).

The “Obi” symbolises men’s headship, while the “Mkpuke” symbolises women’s subordination or loyalty to men. According to Uddie (1989), patriarchal capitalist societies were usually characterised with male domination and practices of women subordination. It is the wives who shuttle between the “mkpuke” and the “Obi” for sundry reasons ranging from the offering of food to their husband, presentation of kola nuts to visitors, laying of complaints and making of requests, and sex. The man hardly goes to the “mkpuke” except if something serious happens or if their wife or children are sick. Ojeuga enters his wife’s (Ogechi’s) mkpuke when Nkọlị is seriously attacked by witchcraft:

Mgbe Nkọlị lakpuru ụra, ka ọ malitere tie mkpu pụrụ iche, nke mere ka nne ya jiri ọsọ wulie n’akwa ya... Nkọlị, Nkọlị, olee ihe mere ị na-eti mkpu dị otu a? Nkọlịe kwughị okwu, ma na-ebe akwa. Mgbe ahụ ka Ojeuga bara n’ime ụlọahụ, wee kpọọ ya oku. (p. 62)

(When Nkọlị was sleeping, she shouted very strangely, which made her mother jumped up from her bed... Nkọlị, Nkọlị, why did you shout like this? Nkọlị did not speak, but crying. That is the time Ojeuga entered in that room, called her).

Men do not ordinarily visit their wives’ “mkpuke”; to do so is to tamper with or compromise their status. Throughout the novel, Ojeuga did not enter his first wife’s (Nne Ekwutọsị’s) “mkpuke”. He only summons his wives to his “Obi” when he wants to settle some issues between them as he did when his wives fought (p. 37). But, whenever, the woman needs the attention of her husband, she goes to the “Obi” as shown in another situation where Ogechi runs to Ojeuga’s “Obi” to alert him concerning Nkọlị’s feverish condition as a result of the persistent witchcraft attacks (p. 63). Undoubtedly, ‘Obi’ is the centre of attraction in the Igbo compound and it is made poignantly clear that the man who dwells there is more powerful and superior to the wives who go there to do his bidding.

The above illustrations are some of the instances that reveal that male headship and superiority is reflected in the language used to portray men in Igbo society. However, Uwasomba (2008) argues that the binary opposition between the “Mkpuke” and “Obi” is healthy and desirable for the progress and survival of the Igbo society. The structure of relationship between the “Mkpuke” and the “Obi” throws up different but needful values such as compassion, love, peace, the spirit of common motherhood in the ideology of ‘umunne’ and the spirit of competitiveness, masculinity, valour, force and even violence in the ideology of ‘umunna’. Each unit (Obi or Mkpuke), therefore, is not meant to undermine the other or to usurp the power of the other. The above explanation by Uwasomba nevertheless shows that women are hierarchically segregated from men for the purpose of maintaining peace and harmony in Igbo society.

Ubesie's *Isi Akwu Dara N'ala* shows Igbo traditional belief that men are the head of women, and that a woman is nothing without a man. He buttresses this point through Chike's warnings to Ada concerning her wickedness towards him: "... *di nwanyị bu aka Ogori na-ehi n'isi. Nwanyị hapụ di ya, isi eruo ya ala. Ndu nwanyị enweghị isi ma o nweghị nwoke o ji etu onu.*" (p. 135) (... a woman's husband is her pride. If a woman leaves her husband, she will suffer. A woman's life is worthless if she has no man besides her). The above excerpt portrays women as incomplete without a man, which is not acceptable to womanists.

The womanists advocate for peaceful co-existence between men and women. They further encourage women to develop themselves financially in order to be useful in the family, and society at large. Ubesie also presents men's superiority in the family through Chike's mother. This is evidenced through Okechukwu, Chike's younger brother, who joined the army despite his mother's objection. Chike's mother does not want Okechukwu to join the Biafra army, because she does not want to lose one of his two sons. She shows men's superiority through the metaphorical use of 'Ji' (Yam) to qualify her sons: "*Ji ole ka m nwere, wee hu nke m ga-iji aka m tuhapuru onye mu amaghi?*" (p. 21) (How many yams do I have, that I should willingly drop one for someone I do not know). 'Yam' is superior to all the crops in Igbo land, and only men cultivate it (Ogbalu, n.d., p. 10). Consequently, Chike's mother uses it to depict men as the superior being in the family.

Meniru's *Nwaeze* and Kammelu's *Makuchukwu* show that in patriarchal Igbo society, men discuss their daughter's dowry payment, without involving women. Ifeyinwa's mother in *Nwaeze* is pictured when her husband called her to bring cola-nut for their in-laws and she left immediately after presenting the cola-nut to her husband. Kammelu's *Makuchukwu* shows that Makuchukwu's dowry was paid to his younger brother, while her mother, Chikwuorum, is not mentioned at all. Uddie (1989) posits that patriarchal capitalist societies were usually characterised with male domination and practices of women subordination. Odimegwu and Okemgbo (2003) show that in Igbo patriarchal family system there is structural inequality based on sex differences and socially constructed economic roles which place women on subsidiary roles as dependants who lack control over their lives.

Domestic Ideology

The male and the female writers portray domesticity as solely women's affair. In Igbo society, domesticity is seen as women's role. Nzeako's *Nkọlị* presents dual pictures of women, responsible vs irresponsible, in the domestic environment. Ogechi is shown as a responsible woman who cares and prepares her husband's food immediately she comes back from the market, where she has gone to sell her goods, while Nne Ekwutosị is an irresponsible and uncaring wife. Her irresponsibility is as a result of not cooking for her husband. This is evidenced when she denies her husband (Ojeuga) food: "*Mgbe ahụ ka nne Nkọlị dọtara ya (Ojeuga) ihe oriri, o wee rie ya ka oke nkịta, ma nne Ekwutosị ajughị ya ma o ga-eri ihe, ma o bu na o gaghị eri.*" (p. 45) (It was that time that Nkọlị's mother brought food for him (Ojeuga) and he ate it like a male dog, but Ekwutosị's mother did not ask him whether he will eat or not). Nzeako uses simile to compare the way Ojeuga ate Nne Nkọlị's food as 'oke nkịta' (a male dog) to show that Ojeuga is very hungry but Nne Ekwutosị does not bother to feed him. Ordinarily, this usually happens in a polygamous home, where women quarrel most of the time. Nne Ekwutosị does not care about feeding

her husband, because she feels he supports her co-wife, Ogechi (Nne Nkọlị), when she (Nne Ekwutọsị) had a fight with her. Womanists are against women's' irresponsibility in the family, especially as it concerns their husbands. The womanists urge women to coexist peacefully for the unity and progress of their families. Nzeakọ also presents Ogechi and Nne Ekwutọsị as irresponsible. They did not cook for their husband as a result of the fight they had, which made their husband, Ojeụga, unable to sleep that night because of hunger "*O wee buru nwoke na-alu nwanị abụọ, ma ofe ezughịrị ya nri.*" (p. 41) (It shows a man is marrying two wives, yet he is starving). The above excerpt portrays shows the polygamous nature of Igbo society and its attendant problems in domestic sphere.

Ubesie's *Isi Akwụ Dara N'ala* presents women's domestic disposition through Ada. Ada insists on cooking their children's food before taking them to Aguata as Chike suggested because the war has reached their house in Awka. Chike continues warning her to leave the food. Ada's reply shows women as naturally domestic: "*Nna Chukwuma, unu bu ụmụnwọke na-elere ihe ọbụla n'elu elu. M duruo ha Aguata, gịni ka ha ga-eri? Kwe m ka m sichaa ihe m na-esi.*" (p. 46) (Chukwuma's father, you men look at things on the surface. If I take them to Aguata, what would they eat? Allow me to finish what I am cooking). Ada's focus is on cooking for her family. Chike's words demonstrate that men think differently from women.

Women have innate sense to provide food for their family. Ada is interested in the safety of her children and also in cooking the food that will sustain them at Aguata. But, Ubesie presents Ada as a stubborn, disobedient and uncaring mother, who think less on the safety of her children. Ubesie unknowingly shows (through Ada's words to Chike) that men do not reason ahead like women. Ada cares about her children's safety and their sustenance. Men react based on what happens within their immediate environment, while women think beyond their present situation.

For womanists, Ada is a real mother who cares for the well-being of her family. She maintains her domestic role as a mother and senses that getting food on their way to Aguata will be difficult as a result of the war, but Chike thinks his money can get whatever they need on their way. However, money, at times, does not get one's immediate need. Chike could not buy water at Aguata when their water finished. Inadvertently, Ubesie's portrayal demonstrates that women are reasonable, intuitive and responsive to situations, especially domesticones.

Ubesie also portrays Ada as irresponsible when she abandons her domestic responsibility. He makes Ada's irresponsibility very prominent through portraying Chike cooking for his children when Ada comes back to the house from Nanka: "*Chike nọ n'ebe ọ na-esonye ọkụ n'ihe o sinyeere ụmụaka, nụ ụda ụgbọ na-abịa.*" (p. 132) (Chike heard from where he is cooking for his children, a sound of a car coming). The fact that Chike is cooking presents Ada as irresponsible mother, who abandoned her children for her own personal financial gain. This is because her husband, Chike, is not expected to be seen cooking. In Igbo society, men do not normally cook because cooking is women's domestic role. But, Ikpe (2009), as earlier mentioned, shows that:

There is nothing biological in the ability to cook. This means that a man is biologically capable of cooking but due to social expectations, he does not cook. Thus, cooking has been socially constructed for the female gender. But men would willingly cook, when cooking becomes an employment from which one could earn a living. (p. 6)

The portrayal of women as irresponsible, especially in terms of cooking, is against the womanists' stand because men can help in cooking if their wives are indisposed. Womanists frown at women's lack of responsibility in the family. Their suggestion for the women is to assist in the sustenance of their family, including financial aspect, which will earn them respect, recognition and inclusion in family decision taking. For feminists, especially material feminists, women's domestic work is unpaid labour and should be abolished because it promotes gender inequality. Consequently, they advocate for socialization of domesticity, where people would be employed to do domestic jobs as well as public kitchen, where people would go out to eat, in order to reduce women's domestic labour. Although, in contemporary African society, including Igbo, most women have socialised domesticity in order to achieve their aim in life and compete with men globally, the African womanists view domesticity as women's prerogative. They advise women to work for the unity and progress of their family.

Meniru in *Nwaeze* presents idyllic picture of women's domesticity in traditional Igbo society. She shows mainly women as those who do domestic chores in the family through Ifeyinwa, Nwaeze's mother and Ebuzoaju, Ifeyinwa's friend. She shows domesticity as women's education during colonial period. Nwaeze's parents married Ifeyinwa, for Nwaeze, because she is trained in school on how to do domestic chores, such as washing clothes and cooking food (p. 3). Gaidzanwa (2003) affirms that:

During the missionary era boys were trained to assume leadership and public roles in their societies, native girls were trained to become wives who had to run the homes and bear the children of these leaders. When girls were eventually allowed to go to school domesticity was the cornerstone of missionary education for women. (p. 4)

From the foregoing, it is evident that women had no access to Western education. When women were eventually given some access to education, they were trained domestically for the benefit of men. This type of education that the African society allotted to women was attributed to the colonial framework and official thinking that women were not to be agents of administration nor community leaders (chiefs), court clerks, court messengers" (Agaba, 2007: 80), and political leaders, managers, lawyers, bankers, reputable writers and professionals. Ifeyinwa is shown cooking in the kitchen when Nwaeze's father's kindred came to her parents' house to ask for her hand in marriage: "*Ifeyinwa n'orij n'usekwu na-esi nri, n'ih na ndi nile b'ara ga-eri nri. Mama nna ya na umunna ya n'or n'obi chere ndi na-abia.*" (p. 5) (Ifeyinwa was already in the kitchen cooking, because their guest will be fed. But her father and his kindred were in the family sitting room waiting for their guest). Cooking is shown as women's sole responsibility in the family.

Meniru also shows women's domesticity in the family. Ifeyinwa takes care of Nwaeze's room and food. She sweeps, cleans and decorates Nwaeze's room with a beautiful pot of flower when Nwaeze arrives Nigeria. She serves him food immediately he steps out of the bathroom. Meniru also shows that women's domestic work in traditional Igbo society starts early in the morning. Ifeyinwa goes to the stream early in the morning with other girls to fetch water before it is dawn. When she comes back, she sweeps the compound and the rooms (p. 8). Nwaeze's mother is shown to take care of the cooking

after her husband, Mgbokwere, informs her of different things they will do concerning their son's (Nwaeze's) reception. They will kill a cow and two goats, cook rice, pound yam and cassava (fufu). They will cook bitter leaf soup, egusi and ogbono soups. Mgbokwere tells her they will use some meat to cook soup, fry some meat for stew, some will be for eating, while the head and other parts of the intestine will be used to make a special delicacy (Ngwongwo). After their discussion, Nwaeze's mother immediately goes to the kitchen to start cooking: "... *nwanyị agaa mewe ihe ndị dịrị nwanyị.*" (p. 1) (... the woman went to carry out the women's role).

Meniru also illustrates that both men and women in Igbo society work for the success of the family. Mgbokwere instructs a man, Obi, to kill the cow and the two goats while he goes out to take care of the drinks. He also sends his nephews, Okoroocha and Mgbechi, to bring and arrange seats, plates and spoons for the guests. Nwaeze's sisters, Nwanyinkwo and Okwuoyibo, come from their marital homes to assist their mother in the kitchen. Meniru depicts the complementary roles that men and women play in domestic environments, especially during Igbo ceremonial activities. Nwaeze's mother is also presented as a good cook. She kills chicken and prepares a delicious soup for Nwaeze's girlfriend, Celia, when she arrives at Nwaeze's house from abroad (p. 19). Meniru challenges the Igbo tradition that denies women the right to kill chicken or any type of animal. Meniru also pictures Ifeyinwa and Ebuozọajụ fetching water early in the morning. They fetch water more than twice before daybreak, as girls normally do in traditional Igbo society.

Meniru reveals that the domestic roles that women play in the family makes children in the traditional Igbo family to attach more importance to women than men. She shows through the children's traditional song which Nwaeze's younger siblings and other children (who are playing in Nwaeze's father's compound) are singing that women are more important in the family than men:

<i>"Nke a bu nne nne nne.</i>	(This is mother mother mother.
<i>Nke a bu nna nna nna.</i>	This is father father father.
<i>Nke a okpara nke etiti.</i>	This is the middle son.
<i>Nke a bu o richaa o gba nkiti.</i>	This is one who keeps silent after eating.
<i>Nke a bu nwa."</i> (p. 17)	This is a child).

This song dramatized with the five fingers shows children's perception of the Igbo family hierarchy which highlights mothers as more important than fathers because the children are closer to their mothers than their fathers. Meniru shows that the children count their fingers while singing this song and that: "*Isi aka bu 'nne', nke na-esota ya bu 'nna'.*" (p. 17) (The 'thumb' which is the head finger is 'mother', and the second finger which is the 'first finger' is 'father').

The children, especially in traditional Igbo family, view their mothers as more important than their fathers because of the residential structure of Igbo family, which makes them closer to their mothers than their fathers. The children live only with their mothers in their hut, while their fathers stay in a different house called 'Obi'. They see their fathers only when they go to the 'Obi' and at times, they may not see their fathers until later in the day. The children get up in the morning to see their mothers taking care of the family. Their mothers go to market, cook, sweep, wash, fetch water and firewood and clean the environment. Their mothers feed them, clothe them and take good care of their other

needs. They rarely see their fathers at home; as a result, they assume that their mothers are the only ones taking care of them, without knowing that their fathers go out in order to provide the means for their livelihood.

This explains why the children attach more importance to their mothers than their fathers. Ikwubuzo (2012: 146) unveils that in modern Igbo society, this traditional residential structure has changed. Distinction is no longer made between the father's and mother's houses because a modern house, with a living room and a number of other rooms, can serve the entire family. Children live and relate with their parents in one apartment and are aware of parents' roles in the family.

In *Makuchukwu*, Kammelu reveals that men and women can help each other in the family. Chiziteerem (God sent to me) helps his wife, Makuchukwu, to buy foodstuffs for the family, but whenever he travels, Makuchukwu does the buying. Makuchukwu also assists Chiziteerem, her husband, in providing food for their family when his office stops his salary, as a result of the false accusation levelled against them concerning Nne Ezinwanne's death: "*O bu ndi ulo oru nwunye ya ndi nke na-akwu nwunye ya ntakiri ego onye na-eke ala nna ya na-anata ka e ji azu ezinaulo.*" (p. 66) (It is the National Youth Service stipend she received from her office that she used to take care of her family). The above comment indicates the importance of a woman's job in the family. Chiziteerem helps Makuchukwu to cook food for the family when her work delays her from coming back home early:

Oge Dokita Makuchukwu ga-eji la oru eruela ma onye ka o ga-ahapuru Ezinwanne no n'ura lawa? ... O kporo di ya na foonu gwa ya na ya agaghị alata n'oge na oru kariji akari.... Mgbe ha laruru, o kporo di ya ihe niile mere. Di ya gwara ya gaa ghuo ahụ rie ihe na ya esiela nri. Makuchukwu richara nri, lakpuo ura. (p. 49-51)

(It was time for Doctor Makuchukwu to close for the day but what was she going to do about Ezinwanne who was sleeping? ... She called her husband on phone and told him that she would not come home early due to much work.... When they arrived home, she told her husband all that happened. Her husband told her to go and take her bath and eat because he had cooked. Makuchukwu ate and went to bed).

Kammelu shows in her novel that men can help women domestically at home if the woman shows a sense of responsibility. Makuchukwu contacted her husband when she could not carry out her responsibility and her husband helped out. Makuchukwu's humble and responsible attitude is one of the strategies women should adopt to involve their husbands in housework.

Conclusion

The paper examines ideological systems which inform the gender portrayal in selected male and female-authored Igbo novels. The study shows patriarchal and domestic ideologies as the basic cause of lop-sided portrayal of gender in literature. The male writers elicit the patriarchal ideology of their time. Nzeako, Ubesie and Meniru locate Igbo women to the periphery of their works, where women are presented as wives, mothers, home-keepers, and cooks, whereas they centralize men as the head of the family. The male writers centered on the male protagonist to portray men's works, interactions and relationships with people. Consequently, the male characters are presented as heads of the family and bread-winners while women's achievements and their contributions are ignored. The male

writers restrict women within the confines of a culture which gives them little opportunity to optimize their capacities and potentials. It follows therefore that when they mistakenly deviate from the norm, they are criticized. Consequently, women are portrayed as wicked and irresponsible. The incessant negative portrayal of women by the male writers provokes women to react against it. This is because their portrayals of women negatively trivializes them in the society and reduces them to the level of insignificant beings.

Meniru and Onwuchekwa write out of the need to respond and challenge the ideological tenets that contribute to the unfavourable depiction of women in Igbo novels. They subvert the ideological limitations which women face in their everyday life. By so doing, they portrays women as self-fulfilled despite their wifehood and motherhood. African women scholars (both internationally and locally) based on the African experience, family and gender issues, propagate different shades of African womanism as an approach which women should embrace in their struggle to achieve their potentials. African womanism advocates the inclusion of men in the women's struggle for emancipation since the men are the engineers of women's subordination.

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