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**A SOCIOPRAGMATIC REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN**

**IN IGBO ORAL POETRY**

**BY**

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**ABSTRACT:**

This study examines the portrayal of women in Igbo poetry focusing on the themes of the poems and the way the female characters are depicted. In the introduction, definition of poetry is given and analyzed. The poems are then presented and translated into English and following the theme of each poem outlined the poems are analyzed to examine how women are presented. The poems from both male and female authors have been selected through oral interview and participant observation. The study, therefore, attempts to examine the image of women in Igbo poetry, to investigate whether there is a link in the

expected cultural roles of Igbo women and their roles in Igbo literature and whether there is a shift in the way women are portrayed to represent the current social reality. The study employs social feminist literary criticism as a tool in critically analyzing Igbo poetry that have

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women characters in them and analyze how these women characters have been portrayed. Women in Igbo poetry are examined in relation to their role in the poems and the titles of the poems are also investigated and critically analyzed to establish whether they portray any gender stereotypes. The themes of the selected poems are also examined to establish if there is any gender biasness. The findings of the study revealed that gender played a crucial role in the depiction of characters in the poetry. Gender differentiation begins at birth. The analyses also revealed that women were depicted in a biased manner that confirms and promotes the patriarchal nature of the Igbo society. A reflection of women stereotypes was observed where women characters were depicted as gold-diggers, untrustworthy, greedy, submissive, dependent, and betrayers in the poems analyzed. The study further revealed that women are portrayed in a biased manner that does not reflect the current political and social reality. The images depicted in the study contribute towards the perpetuation of stereotypes that characterize woman as housewives, dependant, weak-minded, not capable of taking decision etc. which is in contrast with the social reality of those women. . The study concludes that there is gender bias in the manner in which women are depicted in Igbo poems that do not reflect the current social reality.

**Key words: Poetry, theme, stereotype, metaphor, symbolism and language.**

**INTRODUCTION**

This study seeks to investigate how representation or portrayal of women, especially in Igbo literature, with special reference to poetry, is manifested. The image of African women will be assessed and redefined, and how women have control over their own lives and are therefore the architects of their future.

Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is of the view that rural women play a key role in supporting their households and communities in achieving food and nutrition security as their responsibilities. They improve rural livelihood by generating income and overall well-being. They also contribute to agriculture and rural enterprises as well as fuel to global economies. Yet, they face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights and hamper efforts to improve their lives as well as those of others around them.

Socially, politically and economically women are still fighting for their rightful places. Literature perpetuates and portrays a particular view of reality as seen by the writers. In other words, writers promote norms, values and customs they consider important. Similarly, norms and values they do not consider valuable or necessary may be downplayed. The images of Igbo women in poetry have implications on how they view themselves and how others view them.

Poetry is a literary genre in which figurative language plays a key role. Hadza and Fortune (1979:43) refer to the unique use of language in poetry:

*Poetry is a special form of language. All the elements of language, sound, grammar and meaning are necessary ingredients in the material of poems. What distinguishes poetry from the free use of language in prose is the fact that these ingredients are usually combined in distinctive patterns, normally those of common speech.*

The use of language in poetry is thus different from the everyday language use. According to Levis (1944:14), “poetry is a special way of using words in order to create a special effect upon the reader and to light up the world for him”.

The special use of words is a feature poets use to express their feelings and emotions over their life experiences. A poet uses figurative language such as metaphors, similes, personification and so forth to create images of objects and ideas in the mind of the reader. The images poets use in their poetry awaken emotional responses and may also give rise to attitudes and perceptions in the reader. The figurative language that poets employ allows the reader to bring out the meaning of the poem and what the poem suggests. The meaning or subject of a poem is called the theme of the poem, and for the reader to understand the theme, he or she must read the poem critically. According to Grace (1965:63):

*Poetry touches the emotions deeply… the poet’s imagery tells us many things besides what is overtly presented the overt presentation may be the least important aspect of what she/he has to say.*

***The Igbo People***

The Igbo occupy the five eastern states of Nigeria namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo. These states are collectively referred to as “Alaigbo” (Igbo land) and the people known as “Ndigbo” (Igbo people). There are also native speakers of Igbo in two other states of Delta and Rivers, though they are minorities in those states. Igbo language is also spoken as a second language in Niger Delta and Cross River Basin. In today’s world, Igbo people are found in virtually every nook and cranny of Nigeria and the world as settlers who engage in trade, commerce, and civil service work for their daily survival.

The Igbo are one of the three major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. The Igbo people speak a common language, Igbo, which is divided into dialects that vary based on locality or community. Greenberg (1963) notes that Igbo belongs to the Niger-Congo language family is classified in the “kwa” language phyla alongside Akan, Igala, Nupe, Ebira, Edo, Idoma, Yoruba to mention but a few.

**Concept of Oral Poetry**

Oral poetry is poetry that is composed and transmitted without the aid of writing. Oral poetry is considered to include any poetry which is performed live. Oral poetry exists most clearly within oral cultures, but it can survive, and indeed, in highly literate culture. Oral poem is a song its composer is its performer. Whatever he performs he recreates, his art is firmly nurtured and supported by his use of traditional accessories. Miruka (1997:38) defines oral poetry as “the verbal expression of feelings, and thought using versified language”. The oral poem is principally composed and created using words of mouth. In oral performance, especially song, the text is often not fixed. The three ways in which a poem can readily be called oral are in terms of its composition, mode of transmission, and performance.

Igbo oral poetry, for instance, is performed on certain occasions which reflect the emotion evoked. If it is a festive occasion it evokes the emotion of joy, and if it is a sorrowful occasion, it evokes the emotion of sorrow. Babalola (1974:11) defines poetry as “striking rhythmical expression of elevated thought and feeling in figurative language”. This definition appears to meet our concept of poetry for in addition to rhythm, thought and emotion, account is taken of the poetic effect of figurative language. Oral poetry depends on performance for its effects for in such situation the aesthetic satisfaction is heightened as both the visual and acoustic effects are realized.

**Concept of Gender**

Gender differs from sex in its usage. Accordingly, sex refers to the biological characteristics with which we are born, and gender is usually associated with the learned attitudes and behaviours that qualify people of one sex or the other. In other words, the term gender is usually associated with the social, psychological and cultural attributes of masculinity and femininity which are mainly based on biological distinctions. Gender is said to include people’s self image (gender identity) and social expectations of individual behaviour. As Lee (2005) notes gender encompasses biological sex but extends beyond it to the socially prescribed roles deemed appropriate for each sex by the culture in which we live. Sex, on the other, refers to the physical and biological qualities people are endowed with by nature.

Millet (1973:31) asserted that gender is “the sum total of the parents’, peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression”. Generally speaking, while the term sex is used to denote male and female human beings depending on their biological features like chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features, gender is used to denote men and women on the basis of social factors such as social roles, position, behaviour and identity. Tyson (2006:110) avers that “gender is socially constructed rather than a matter of biology. Women and men usually behave in ways associated with their assigned gender because they are socially programmed to do so, not because it is natural for them to do so”.

Gender is the space carved out by culture for male and female to operate in society. The stratification of space is organized in such a way that put the men at the upper stratum and the women at the lower stratum. This study attempts to probe into how women are portrayed in Igbo oral poetry. Gender is a cultural and social construct in society as earlier mentioned. Among most Africans, men have been culturally constructed as “self” while women are “other”. These constructions are produced by the patriarchal culture prevalent in most African societies. Patriarchy is a culture that promotes phallocentric ideology, which designates women as inferior beings and men as superior beings. The patriarchal institution empowers men who use his advantageous position in the scheme of culture to subjugate, marginalize and oppress women. Women under this culture suffer under the patriarchal burden of male domination and female subjugation symbolized by an institutionalized lack of voice and choice (Ujomu, 2001).

In the area of Nigeria poetry, men have always manipulated this literary space in order to misrepresent women and cast them into total obscurity, although some have always engaged the image of women positively in their treatment of feminine issues and other socio-political issues. This positive portrayal of the image of women is especially common in the Negritude poetry of the Francophone African poets such as L. S. Senghor, David Diop and so on.

In the same way, the theme of the poem is often hidden in the figurative use of the language. Abrams (1981:111) defines theme as follows:

*The term theme is more usefully applied to an abstract claim, or doctrine, whether implicit or asserted, which an imaginative work is designed to incorporate and make persuasive to the reader.*

In other words, the theme is the subject or the central idea in the poem.

**Language and Style:**

Language is a vital tool for the verbal artist and the hallmark of style in oral literature is the beauty with which language is used. Chapman (1973) rightly observes that “language materials in poetry are chosen and manipulated with greater care and complexity than average users of the language can or wish to exercise. The diction of Igbo poetry is simple and the artists constantly expand and intensify their ideas from time to time by likening one thing to another through the use of imagery. They also use lexical, grammatical, phonological, graphonological deviation and other stylistic devices such as rhetorical questions and epithets.

Language is the most important communication tool for human beings. It not only reflects the reality of the society, but also has various functions to strengthen and maintain social existence. As a result, language does mirror the gendered perspectives and can also impact and contribute to changing people’s perception of gender over time. Over the years, feminists have shown interest in deserting the differences in language use between women and men, and studies of cultural roles ascribed to gender. However, interest in language usage differences between the two sexes has a very long tradition in attempting to explain the distinction between language and gender and how language supports, enforces and maintains attitudes about gender and women in particular.

Language can be defined in various perspectives. It is the verbal means with which human beings communicate and conduct social interaction. Language can be seen as a systematic means, which human beings use in the communication of thoughts, ideas, feelings and so forth through the use of conventionally accepted symbols, which may be verbal written or even through gestures. In this study, effort is being made to examine how this language use illustrates inbuilt sexist connotation in the sense that it generally indicates positive images for men while negative connotations are assumed for women in Igbo poems.

Language is a system of conventional spoken, manual or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and release.

Poets employ various strategies to achieve beauty in their poems such as symbolism, metaphor, simile, idiomatic expression, rhetorical questions and hyperbole. In other words, poets employ figurative language to achieve artistic effect.

According to Myers and Simms (1989:112), figurative language is defined as “the creative manipulation of the syntax, semantic structure effect or association of normal language used in a vivid expression and innovative ideas”. Wales (1989) asserts that figurative language embraces all kinds of features which are semantically or grammatically marked or unusual in some ways. Giddon (1979) defines figurative language as use of figures of speech which include metaphors, metonymy, synecdoche, idioms, and irony. Language therefore can be conveniently classified as either literal or figurative. When we speak literally, we mean exactly what the word conveys, when we use figurative language, we mean something other than the actual meaning of words. This therefore points out that figurative language is transfer of meaning which must be acquired through encyclopedic entry or entries that work as weak implicatures in Relevance Theory. Some of the figurative linguistic devices that we will look into include:

**METAPHORS:**

According to Giddon (1979), a metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is describe in terms of another. In metaphor, a comparison is usually implicit unlike simile where it is explicit. Leech (1965) makes an observation that in metaphor, two or more things not normally thought of as being connected with each other are brought together and fused in the imagination of the other. From a pragmatic point of view, the meaning communicated by the use of a particular word or phrase differs from the linguistically encoded or literal meaning assigned by the grammar. Thus, metaphor is a form of broadening whereby the meaning communicated is far from the literal meaning.

Cruse (2004:41) observes that “a metaphor induces the hearer or reader to view a thing, state of affairs or whatever is being like something else by applying to the former linguistic expression which is more normally employed in references to the latter”. Myers and Simms (1989) and Wales (1989) are in agreement that just like similes, metaphors have got something to do with transfer of meaning and the context of their usage is important for the inferential meaning. Cruse (2004:205) asserts that metaphors are essential components of human cognition which is conceptual in nature and is a means whereby the abstract and intangible areas of experience can be conceptualized in terms of the familiar and concrete.

In this study, we shall focus on metaphors as a process of broadening in lexical pragmatic theory. The poet’s effective use of metaphors by selecting appropriate words that are concealed and euphemized will be examined in the study.

**SYMBOLISM:**

Robert (1994) explains that a symbol is any object or action that means more than itself, any object or action that represents something beyond itself. He further says that the meaning of any symbol, whether an object, an action or a gesture, is controlled by its context. Symbolism is a device that stands for representation. It is the use of a sign whether visual or verbal which stands for something else within a speech community. Like any interpretative connections we make in reading, the decision to view something as a symbol depends partly on whether the poetic context invites and rewards a symbolic reading (Robert, 1994:419). A symbol is a concrete or familiar object that is used to refer or to explain an abstract idea and less familiar reality.

Imagery is the backbone of poetry. Components of imagery are descriptive words and figures of speech. This success of Igbo oral poetry depends on the use of imagery. Preminger (1963:363) says “imagery is used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem” and Miruka (1994:113) maintains that “imagery achieves vivid configuration of the subject matter in the audience’s mind”. Some of the aspects of imagery used by Igbo oral poets include metaphor, simile, euphemism, hyperbole, symbolism, personification, rhetorical questions and allusion just to name a few.

**SIMILE:**

A simile is an explicit comparison between essentially unlike things, actions or feelings, introduced by a connective eg like, as, etc.

**HYPERBOLE:**

Hyperbole is the blowing up of an object or idea much more than its normal size or proportion.

**RHETORICAL QUESTION:**

A rhetorical question is a question asked for the sale of persuasive effect rather than as a genuine request for information, the speaker implying that the answer is too obvious to require reply. Rhetorical questions are meant to convey information to the addressee and do not elicit new information

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK:**

This study is premised on social/Marxist feminist theory. Social/Marxist feminist theory argues that it is possible to isolate gender equality issues from the class society in which they occur. Socialism covers a wide range of political theories and practices from reformist social democracy to revolutionary Marxist communism. Social feminist theory sees collective class interests rather than individual rights as the primary focus of political concern. (Bryson, 1999).

Socialism, like liberalism, promises equal rights and opportunities to all individuals, unlike, liberalism. However, it stresses economic and social rights and freedom of exploitation, and prioritizes the interests of working class people. Consequently, it is of more relevance to ordinary people than the formal legal rights offered by liberalism. Social feminists believe that it is only in the contexts of a general movement to economic equality that the needs of all groups of women rather than those of an elite minority, can be met

Socialist thinking also advocates the abolition or reduction of the division of labour. It is argued that, rather than specializing in one limited task, workers should be enabled to express themselves in a whole range of ways, so that work becomes a form of human fulfillment rather than alienation and degradation. (Bryson, 1999). In some early socialist thought, the opposition to division of labour included that between women and men. This general idea ties in with recent feminist analyses, which holds that women should be enabled to do men’ swork, that men should develop their caring and nurturing qualities through participation in family life and childbearing, that sexuality should be liberated from gender stereotypes, and that ascribed and limited gender roles should be ended.

**EMPIRICAL STUDIES:**

Ezeifeka and Ogbazi (2016) investigate the feminist undercurrent in selected Igbo songs: contemporary Igbo women’s voice. The paper investigates selected Igbo songs and argues that they provide a good niche for gender construction, negotiation and contestation. These songs, got through participant observation during traditional ceremonies touch the domain of lineage perpetuation/inheritance rights, family life, marriage, and leadership roles. The study found that whereas men’s songs emphasize hegemonic masculinity, women’s portray various attitudes to the masculinised social order as complaint, ambivalent and resistant. The paper concludes that these songs speak for what can best be called compromise feminism in Igbo gender performance.

Kalu (2001) holds the view that the dearth of African literary genres that supports the African woman’s participation in recreation and maintenance of societal vision provides evidence of her silencing and apparent invisibility in Africa’s encounter with the West. Her participation is more overt in the pre-colonial arena. Although African writers did not exclude her for the emerging culture that impressed African experience for a largely external readership, her portrayal became problematic in the contemporary setting which devised rules for her participation in the new dispensation. This seems a minor problem except that the task of reasserting the African woman’s presence was left to western educated African men who, themselves, were inadequately inscribed in the new dispensation.

Oloruntoba (1998), is of the view that the entrenchment of a cultural view of woman from a bio-essential lens was a standard staple of early male authored Nigerian literature. It manifested largely in three relegation forms. Firstly, in the absence of any grand representation of the female character in the literature. Secondly, is the portrayal of female characters only in the domestic sphere and only in relation to nurturing and mothering roles. Thirdly, in the negative portrayal of women.

Ohale (2010) in her view makes mention of some of the prominent African literature authors such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Cyprain Ekwensi, Ngugi wa Thiongo and others who invariably became favourites of the Western academic discourse on modern literature. In spite of their critical success they enjoyed as male authors, the dearth of strong female presence is apparent in their works and presents an unbalanced picture of Africa life, ignoring the important roles that women have played and continue to play in African society. As a result, feminist critics have denounced the patriarchal bent in their novels, citing that women have been cast in marginal roles and depicted as mere objects of sexual gratification, procreation and idle gossips.

Chukwuma (2002) avers that the female character in African fiction is a facile lack-lustre human beings, the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she does bears only daughters. In home, she was not part of decision-making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decision affected her directly.

In many African texts, the female gender is stereotyped as either the fertile and nurturing earth mother or lazy disastrous beauty. This perception is regarded as the African woman’s identity- the mother, caretaker, not the provider or independent woman known in today’s society. The difference in gender roles is a division determined by different functions performed by African man and woman, whereby men were generally responsible for war and long distance trade, helping to clear land, hunting and running political affairs, while women took care of household chores, such as supplying water, cooking food, gathering firewood, gardening and small scale subsistence and neighbourhood trading.

Fonchingong (2006:136) contends that male writers who examine women also assist in endorsing an “institutionalized an d one-sided vision of female heroism in African fiction.” This point endorses the fact that the presentation of the female gender is mostly sloppy and biased. The point that needs to be made is that although pre-colonial Africa was not a paradise for women, it was not hell on earth. African women were neither chattels pounded like yams of the Igbo nor ignorant of their own bodies until the whites came. When the final balance sheet of Western imperialism has been assessed, it should be obvious that African women have tried to survive not because of the benefits of imperialism but of its belligerent and devaluing ideologies. The legacy of imperialism, in its many facets, is that in its attempt to civilize or rather westernized African cultures, it took away the rights that African women had in pre-colonial society.

**Data Presentation and Analysis**

This section presents and analyzes the poems selected that has female lexemes or portray women in Igbo society

Analysis of the Selected Igbo Poems.

**Poem 1: Nwaanyi**

Nwaanyi okooko nke uwa – Woman, a flower of the earth

Ndi uwa huru ya n’anya – The world loves her

Ndi uwa na-echekwaba ya – The world protects her

A na-akwanyere ya ugwu karia eze – She is respected more than a king

O nweghi ihe na-enwe ya mmekpa ahu – She is not bothered by anything

O na-eri mana o naghi aru – She eats without working

Ihe oma bu nke ya – Good things belong to her

O bu urufia onye nrafu – She is a Bulbul bird – a betrayer

N’eclu aja ulo, ka o nwere enyi – She has friends in wall

O meriri Samson – She defeated Samson

O nweghi ihe o buru ya – To her it is not an issue

I me gi ichiri nsi umu anumanu – To let you hold animal dung

**Theme of the poem:**

The poem “Nwaanyi” (Woman) exposes the evil nature of women as a way of warning men not to be manipulated by them.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

In the first stanza, a woman is depicted as beautiful creature that is respected, protected and taken care of by the nation as a whole. This is illustrated through the use of metaphors in the first stanza:

Okooko nke uwa – Flower of the earth.

A na-akwanyere ya ugwu karia eze – She is respected more than a king.

O na-eri mana o naghi aru – She eats without working.

The poet employs symbolism by using the word ‘okooko’ (flower), which portrays the image of beauty. The image that a flower creates is of a woman’s beauty that is beyond reproach. The highest level in which the woman is loved and respected by everyone is portrayed by the use of exaggeration, “A na-akwanyere ya ugwu karia eze” (she is respected more than a king). ‘O na-eri mana o naghi aru’ (she who eats without working) confirms the stereotype that men are the sole providers in the family and a woman’s place is in the kitchen.

In the Igbo traditional society, the man is the sole provider of the traditional family. It should be noted, that in the Igbo modern society, there are many professional women who fend for themselves.

The poet uses a contrast between the first and second stanza, to illustrate that the woman does not deserve the respect that she is given. Despite the respect and protection that she gets, she still engages in evil acts. In the second stanza, the poet employs a metaphor referring to a woman as “Urufia” (bulbul bird). A bulbul bird migrates during winter and is known for its constant singing throughout the day and all year long.

Like the first woman in Bible, Eve, who is alleged to have led Adam into temptation, women are considered to be deceivers. A woman is also said to be opportunistic and a betrayer in that she stays with a man only when he provides for her and quickly leaves when he is no longer able to do so. Also, women are said to be talkative and hairs like the bird that sings throughout the day all year long. A particular Igbo idiom attests to this, “ekwerekwu ka nwaanyi” (As talkative as woman). The poet thus confirms a woman’s manipulative, deceitful and untrustworthy character. The reference to the Samson story in the Bible can perhaps be ascribed to the author’s religious beliefs, and the fact that the Bible constantly warns men to be careful not to be deceived by the evil, who sometimes may use women to lead them into temptation.

**Poem 2: Ajo Nwaanyi (Wicked woman)**

Umu nwaanyi bu ihe okike gbogwojuru anya – Women are wonderful creature.

Umu nwaanyi bu udele – Women are vultures

Umu nwaanyi bu agunkwo – Women are hawk

Ha nwere ike hapu gi mgbe obula – They can easily leave you

Ihe oma na-adi ha mma – They like nice things

Okwa di elu na-adi umu nwaanyi mma – Women like high positions

Nkwanyere ugwu na-adi umu nwaanyi mma – Women like status

Inwe akunauba na-adi ha mma – Women like wealth

Ego na-adi umu nwaanyi mma – Women like money.

Akwa na-adi umu nwaanyi mma – Women like clothes

Akwa ha bu agutaghi aguta – Their clothes are countless

Akorongwa usekwu na-adi umu nwaanyi mma – They like utensils

Ufodu akorongwa usekwu bu nke ha anaghi emetu aka – Their utensils are stored unused for years.

Ihe kariri afo ise – Five years is nothing for them.

Umu nwaanyi bun di mpako – Women are people of status

Aha ugboala di iche iche – Names of cars

Bu nganga ha – Is their pride

Ulo na-egbuke egbuke na-adi ha mma – They like mansions

Ulo na-egbuke egbuke ka ha ji akpa nganga – Mansions are their pride

O nweghi ihe okooko buru ha – To them flower is nothing

O nwere ihe ha ji okooko eme? – Can they really be bothered by flowers?

Okooko bu akwa ha – Flowers are their clothes

Ha onwo ha bu okooko – They are flowers themselves.

Umu nwaanyi bu okike Chukwu kere na-agbawoju anya – Woman are wonderful creatures.

**Themes of the poem:**

The poem “Ajo Nwaanyi” (Wicked woman) exposes the evil character of women who are portrayed as greedy, materialistic and gold-diggers.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

The metaphor in the first stanza refers to women as ‘udele’ (vulture), agunkwo (hawk who can easily leave you). The images forcefully conveyed the ruthlessness of women. They go after men’s wealth and snatch it from them like vultures and hawks. The poet employs symbolism with the words, akunauba (wealth) and ego (money) in the second stanza to illustrate women’s love for money.

Women’s materialistic nature is depicted in the second and third stanzas where the poet emphasizes their love for clothes, utensils, luxury cars and mansions. The use of the word “agutaghi aguta” (countless) in the second line of the third stanza illustrates women’s wide array of clothes. The poet uses the above exaggeration to stress the extravagance of women. This extravagance is taken further in the metaphor “ha anaghi emetu akorongwa usekwu ha aka otutu afo” (their kitchen utensils are stored unused for years).

The poet is seemingly concerned only about women’s love of material things. She is silent about men’s love for luxury cars. In other words, it is acceptable for men to love cars but not for women to love material things. The same can be said about the love for money, status and so on. Men love money and status as well, but the impression that one gets from reading the poem is the bias against women and thus gender bias. In Igbo culture, equality between men and women is not accepted which explained why the poet expects women to behave differently to men, and why she condemns women who behave like men.

**Poem 3: Nwunye onye nkuzi (A wife of a teacher)**

Nwunye onye nkuzi – A wife of a teacher

Kwa ubochi o noro n’oche na-ele so anya – Daily she lazily and comfortably sits on a chair watching

O hulatara ala dika onye nnabata – Bowing down like an initiate

Na-atuchaghari mbo aka ya dika idegide – She knits her fingers like spider webs

Otu ekpem tii no ya n’akuku – A bottle of tea next to her

Oge niile o na-erecha – Always looking gorgeous

O bu oka mma n’iba mba – She is good at scolding people

Odibo ya na-anata mkpari ndia n’ihi ubiam – Her servant tolerates her due to poverty.

O na-akpa nganga ka onye luru di na be ndi ukwu– She is proud as if she is

married to a royal family

O na-ewe nri esiri ebe ozo dika ihe ruru unyi – She despises food from other homes as dirty

O chefuola ubiam di be nna ya – She has forgotten the poverty from her parents’ home

O ji oru di ya kpuchie onwe ya – She clothes herself with her husband’s profession

E ji ya eme ihe ebe obula – It is used everywhere

Ma ebe a na-ere ihe mana n’ime ugbo ala – In shops, in bus – she must always come first

Ndi ozo enweghi ihe ha buru ya – Others are nothing to her

O chefuola na ike ya niike bu naani n’ulo ya ka o di – She forgets that her authority applies at her home, not everywhere

Ebe obibi ya na-acha ka ugbala – The house is spotlessly clean like eagle

Bu maka na nwa odibo emeela ya – Is because the servant has done everything perfectly well

Madam na-eti naani so iwu – Madam just gives orders

O buola nnukwu ibu dika osisi baobab – She has grown tremendously like a baobab tree.

Nwantiti oge o hiwe ura n’elu akwa – A slight sneeze she sneaks into bed

Nri ibu n’elu akwa ka a na-ebugara ya – Food will ultimately be served in bed

Onye nkuzi enweghi onu okwu – The teacher doesn’t have a say

Mgbe o ka bu nwata o na-etu onu – When still young, he would boast his manhood

Kedu ihe na-eme ugbu a? – What happens now?

Ya tie nwunye ya ihe, ka anyi hu ma o ga-emenwu ya – Let him hit his wife, let’s see if he can

Oge o ji akpo di ya daddy – She calls her husband daddy

Bu na ngwucha onwa – Only at month end

Di ya ga-eji ugwo onwa ya etu ahu a kwuru ya garuo n’ulo – The money has to reach home intact

**Themes of the poem:**

In the poem “Nwunye onye nkuzi” (wife of a teacher), the poet condemns proud women who are abusive to their husbands.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

A woman is defined based on her relationship with her husband. She is not independent and shields herself under her husband’s profession as conveyed in the title of the poem, ‘Nwunye onye nkuzi’ (A wife of a teacher). The stereotype of a lazy housewife is evident where the woman stays lazily at home expecting to be supported by her husband. The woman is also depicted as cruel as expressed in the poem thus “the teacher’s wife is always scolding”. This expression emphasizes how she ill-treats her helper.

The use of a simile “O na-akpa nganga ka onye luru di na be ndi ukwuu” (She is proud as if she is married to a royal family) in the first line of the third stanza indicates the extent of her arrogance that the woman cloak under her husband’s profession stresses her lack of independence as she shields herself with her husband’s achievement.

The woman neither works nor does she do the household chores – the helper does everything for her. The expression that her compound is spotlessly clean emphasizes how hard the helper is made to work. The woman’s laziness is emphasized in the following lines of the poem:

The house is spotlessly clean

The servant has done everything perfectly well

The madam just gives orders.

The poet uses the words, odibo (servant) and madam (woman) in the poem to expose the master-servant relationship between the woman and her helper. The woman is portrayed as abusive to both her husband and her servant. The servant’s abuse is indicated in the last line of the second stanza “ odibo ya na-anata mkpari ndi a n’ihi ubiam” (Her servant only tolerates her because of poverty).

Her husband has to bring his pay cheque home in full, otherwise he will be in trouble. This idiomatic expression exposes the danger that may befall the husband should he not comply. The image of a gold-digger is present in the poem. This is expressed when the poet says “she calls her husband ‘daddy’ during month end”. The image illustrates the manipulative nature of the women. Just as indicated in the powerful character of a woman through Samson’s story in the Bible, the poet condemns the manhood of the woman’s husband. When he was still young he used to boast that he would never allow a woman to undermine him. But now that he is married, he accepts the woman’s abuse and remains silent about it for fear of becoming a laughing stock.

**Poem 4: O bu Nwaanyi (It is a woman)**

Onye ka a ga-ahu n’anya – Who is capable of loving?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye ka a ga-akpo asi? – Who is capable of hating?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike igba asiri? – Who is capable of gossiping?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike itaji anya – Who is capable of despising?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike inwe ndidi – Who is capable of being patient?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye na-ewe iwe oku? – Who is short-tempered?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike ime mmegwara – Who is capable of paying revenge?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike mgbaghara – Who is capable of forgiving?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Odidi nwaanyi na-agbagwoju anya – A woman is a wonderful creature

Obibi n’udo nwoke na nwaanyi– To be able to live harmoniously with bu ikpachapuru ya anya her, you should handle her with care

Gwa ya okwu oma – Tell her beautiful words

Ka udo wee di – You will get along well

**Themes of the poem:**

“It is a woman” depicts the dynamic nature of a woman. The poet maintains that a woman is capable of being good or evil depending on how she is treated. The poet warns that in order to live harmoniously with a woman, they must handle her with care.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

A woman is portrayed as capable of expressing opposite extreme characters. The poet employs rhetorical questions in the first stanza to illustrate the variable traits of a woman. Each stanza with exception of the last one contains two rhetorical questions expressing a woman’s contrasting characteristics and also emphasizing how unpredictable a woman’s character is. She is capable of loving and hating, she is capable of exercising patience and being short tempered, she is capable of expressing vengeance and forgiveness. All these traits are contrasted with each other in different stanzas in order to illustrate the unpredictability and complexity of the character of a woman.

In the second stanza, the poet breaks the monotony of listing the opposing traits of a woman and instead emphasized a woman’s gossiping character:

Onye nwere ike igba asiri? – Who is capable of gossiping?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

Onye nwere ike itaji anya – Who is capable of despising?

O bu nwaanyi – It is a woman

The poet stresses the uniqueness of these two female characteristics by compiling them in a single stanza instead of contrasting them as in the other stanzas. In the final stanza, the reader is given advice on how to avoid trouble and to live harmoniously with these complicated human beings.

**Poem 5: Ejila nwaanyi hie isi (Never trust a woman):**

Kedu ihe I jiri ichekeoku egwu egwu? – Why do you play with hot ash?

I gwa ya ihe niile di gi n’obi? By expressing everything in your heart?

Were noro na-enweghi ihe nzuzo na ugwu – And remain without a secret and dignity?

Kedu ihe I na ezere onye mere ihe – Why do you reveal to someone

E ji chupuru gi ebe isi enweta ndu – Who caused you to be chased

Ihe nzuzo gi? – From the garden?

O bun a I maghi na nwaanyi bu nwaanyi? – Don’t you know that a woman is a woman?

Mechie onu gi kpum – Seal your secrets

Were igwe gbaa gi ogige – Fence it with iron rod

Were owu kechie onu gi – Seal them with wax

Zoo ihe nzuzo gi nke oma – Hide your secrets securely

Nwanne nwaanyi obula bu nne ya – Her relative is only her mother.

Atukwasala nwanne ya nwoke obi – Do not trust her dear brother

Nwunye gi ka o bu – She is your wife

O bughi nwanne gi – She is not your sibling

Mgbe ego koro gi – When you shed leaves during winter

O hapu gi jewara ebe masiri ya – She will leave you alone

Kpachara anya gi n’ebe akunauba di – Be careful with matters that deal with wealth

Ha na Judas bu otu – They took over from Judas

Umu nwaanyi butere odida ndi eze – Women caused the fall of kings

I bu nna umuaka nwaanyi – You are the father of her children

Naani nwaanyi mara nna nwa ya – But a child’s father is known only by his/her mother

**Themes of the poem:**

In the poem, “Atukwasaka nwaanyi obi” (Never trust a woman) gives warning to men to never trust women, especially their wives and never to reveal any secrets to them or discuss money matters with them, as women are gold-diggers.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

The title of the poem contains warning to men never to trust a woman. The reader is warned right from the outset of the untrustworthiness of a woman.

The first line of the poem is the form of a rhetorical question that indicates the danger of a woman. She is likened to hot ash that is something that burns and inflicts pain. Some poets refers to the Bible a way of validating their statements and claims. Since the Bible is regarded as entirely truthful, the portrayal of women in the Bible cannot be disputed. In this poem, the poet refers to Eve’s deceitful tactis in the garden of Eden. Adam, the first man in the Bible, is said to have been deceived by Eve. Even though they were both deceived by the serpent, the blame is solely put on Eve. The poet depicts a woman as untrustworthy in the last two lines of the first stanza:

Kedu ihe I ji eme ka onye – Why do you reveal secrets to

mere ka a chupu gi ebe isi enweta – someone who caused you to be

ndu ihe azuzo gi? – chased from the Garden of Eden?

I maghi na nwaanyi bu nwaanyi – Don’t you know that a woman is a woman?

The poet’s use of repetition in the last line above (a woman is a woman) emphasizes that all women are the same and that they never change. They share the same characteristics with the first woman, Eve who beguiled her husband into eating the forbidden fruit.

The poet advises men to seal their secrets and hide them. Men are warned not to trust women because they are not their siblings, and they may desert them anytime, especially in difficult circumstances.

Atukwasala nwanne nwunye gi nwoke obi – Do not trust her dear brother

Nwunye gi ka o bu – She is your wife

O bughi nwanne gi – She is not your sibling

Mgbe I banyere na nsogbu – When you enter into difficulty

O kwakoro ngowngwo ya gawa ebe ozo – She will pack and leave you alone.

The last two lines of the stanza above contain metaphors that convey the image of an opportunist. “Mgbe I banyere na nsogbu” (when you enter into difficulty), suggests hard times, “O kwakoro ngwongwo ya gawa ebe ozo” (She will pack and leave you alone) highlights the opportunistic nature of a woman. Again, in the second line of the last stanza, a Biblical reference is made, where women are compared with Judas who betrayed Jesus in the Bible. The metaphor they breastfed from the same breast with Judas, compares Judas’ character with that of women, thus emphasizing the seriousness of the poet’s warning to men. The metaphor in the third line of the last stanza depicts the powerful nature of women. “ Nwaanyi butere odida ndi eze” (women caused the fall of kings). This metaphor creates an image of deceit. In the final two lines of the poem, the poet seals his portrait of women by emphasizing their deceitful nature. He warns men that even their children could have been fathered by somebody else because it is only the mother who knows the father of her children.

Gi bu nna umuaka nwannyi – You are the father of her children

Mana nne bu onye mara nna nwa ya – But a child’s father is known only by his/her mother

**Poem 6: Nwaanyi (Woman)**

Nwaanyi, I kerela umu nwoke togbo n’ala! – Women, you have tied men down

Umu okorobia na-akpa maka gi oge niile – Boys are forever discussing about you

Ha na-ekwu maka gi etu I si ekwu maka ha – They talk about you as you talk about them

Umu nwaanyi unu na-ekpori ndu – Women, you are indeed enjoying yourselves!

Kwa ubochi unu a na-esi na-eri – Every day you cook and eat

Di unu ga-azutara unu nri – Your husbands will buy the food

Unu na-enweta ego niile site n’ugwo onwa ha – You get all the money from their salaries

Di unu ga-azutara unu akwa masiri unu – Your husbands will buy clothes of your choice

Umu nwaanyi unu siri ike – Women, you are powerful

Site n’ochi eze unu, unu na-enweta ihe – With your deceitful smile you get

nille masiri unu na-aka umu nwoke – all good things from men

Unu mere Samson ike ya adaa – You brought Samson down

Uwa niile no n’okpuru unu – The world is under your control

Ihe oma niile bu unu na-ebu uzo enweta ya – All the good things come to you first

Ndikom na-egbu onwe ha n’ihi unu – Men shoot each other fighting for you

Umu nwoke ndi nzuzu no n’obodo – Stupid men in cities never go

mepere emepe anaghi eje ulo – back home to their families

ileta umuaka n’ihi unu – because of you.

Ihunanya unu enweghi njedebe – Your love knows no limit

Ma akporomasi unu enweghi ogwugwu – Even your hatred is infinite

Eziomume unu bu ajo agwa – Your kindness results to cruelty

Mmebi unu na-adi uwa tu uwa – When you destroy, you destroy for ever

Umu nwaanyi, unu bu naani ngwa egwu – Women, you are just musical instrument

O buru na agwaghi unu, unu ana-emeghie – If not corrected, you sin

Agwa unu mmeghie unu, unu a hapu – When you are told your mistakes

ihe niile – You leave everything

o nweghi ihe obula unu choro ime –You never accept responsibility

Umu nwaanyi, unu nwere chi oma – Women, you are indeed fortunate

**Themes of the poem:**

The above poem condemns the evil characteristics of women.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

Right from the beginning of the poem, the poet refers to the controlling nature of women and he uses the expression “women, you have tied men down” to emphasize men’s powerlessness. The full dependency of women on their husbands was also noted in the poem. In this poem, the poet stresses the dependency of women on their husbands in the accordance with societal expectations. The second stanza reads as follows:

Kwa ubochi unu a na-esi na-eri – Every day you cook and eat

Di unu ga-azutara unu nri – Your husband buy the food

Unu na-enweta ego niile site n’ugwo onwa ha – You get all the money from their salaries

Di unu ga-azutara unu akwa unu choro – Your husbands will buy you clothes of your choice.

The Biblical Samson is again used to depict the deceitful character of women as in the previous poems. A woman is alleged to be so powerful that she can defeat a strong man. This image is depicted in the last two lines of the third stanza:

Na nwoke siri ike abughi maka unu – A man of strength is nothing to you

Unu mere Samson ike ya adaa – You brought Samson down.

Women are also depicted as trouble makers. When men fight, their fighting is not condemned but, instead, women are blamed as they instigates of the fighting. Similarly, when married men leave their families and do not return, the blame is placed on women who are accused of having seduced them. Women’s trouble-making nature is emphasized in the exaggeration in the last two lines of the fourth stanza:

Umu nwoke na-egburita onwe ha ebe ha na-alu – Men shoot each other

ogu n’ihi unu – fighting for you

umu nwoke ndi nzuzu no n’obodo mepere – Stupid men in cities never

emepe anaghi eje ulo n’ihi unu – go back home to their families because of you.

Women’s unbalanced nature is shown through their extreme emotions. They are portrayed as either extremely hurtful or extremely kind as expressed by the poet in stanza five:

Ihunanya unu enweghi njedebe – Your love knows no limit

Aporomasi unu enweghi ngwucha – Even your hatred is infinite

Mmebi unu na-adi kpam kpam – When you destroy, you destroy forever.

Women are depicted as human beings who cannot control their emotions, which explains why traditionally there are few professional male nurses because nursing was believed to be a feminine profession as it involves a lot of emotion. Igbo men are taught from an early age to endure pain and never cry like a woman when they face difficulties or experience pain.

**Poem 7: Apunanwu Nwaanyi (A pretty woman)**

E ji m anya ime mmuo na-ahu ya – I can see it through the spiritual eye

Apunanwu – Very pretty and scare to the sun

Imi ya kwuru gegerege – She has a sharp pointed nose

Anya ya na-egbuke ka okwute – Eyes like marbles

Obere onu ya di ka onu agiga – A very tiny mouth like a needle hole

Nti ya di ka nke usu – Her ears are that of a bat

Eze ya na-acha ka aku mmiri igwe – Her teeth as white as snow

Kedu maka isi ya? – What about her head?

Lee afo ya anya – Look at her portable belly

O dighi ka nke ezi – Not those flabby ones like pig

Kedu maka ukwu ya? – What about her waist?

Karama mmanya jiri oyi – Bottle of cold drink

Oh! O nwere ahu na-ebu aju – Oh! She has a body to die for

**Themes of the poem:**

In the poem “Apunanwu nwaanyi” (A pretty woman) issues a stern warning to men not to be deceived by a woman’s beauty as beautiful women always have bad characters.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

The poem shows that beautiful woman has a wicked character. In the three stanzas, the poet goes to extreme lengths to expressing the beauty of the woman. Similes are used as such: a waist like a bottle of cold drink, eyes like marble, tiny mouth like a needle hole, teeth as white as snow, little ears like those of a bat, and of course a body to die for.

The portableness of the woman’s body is illustrated in the first line of the third stanza:

Lee afo ya anya – Look at her portable belly

O dighi ka nke ezi – Not those flabby ones like pig

The diminutive very tiny body conjures up the image of a fashion model which is reinforced by the negative phrase, “O dighi ka nke ezi” (Not those flabby ones like pig). The poet prompts the reader to think of the opposite of a pig – a tiny, petite body. The poem confirms the stereotype “the prettier the woman, the more wicked she is”. This idea is found in the English expression; “A woman is like a road, the more curves she has, the more dangerous she is”.

**Poem 8: Nwanyi (woman)**

N’ihi na naani ya no – Due to her loneliness

Adam rioro Chineke – Adam pleaded with God

Maka onye enyemaka – For a companion

Chineke wee nabata aririo Adam –God listened to Adam’s plea

Mgbe Adam na-arahu ura – Adam fell into a trance

Na-ehi ura n’ehihie! – Snoring in daylight

Chineke wee miri ya otu mkpisi ngi ya – God extracted a rib

Iji kee onye enyemaka nye ya – To create a companion for him

N’ezie nwaanyi wee too – Indeed a woman matures

O chokwara onye enyemaka ozo – Does she need support anymore?

A mirila ya otu mkpisi ngi – Indeed the skin has peeled off

Ihe ga na-anu bu: Ebe a bu be m – All you will hear: This is my home.

Na mmalite ihunanya – During the early stages of love

Ihe niike na-aga nke oma – Everything is well

Ihunanya na-aga serere werere – The love is so pleasant

N’obere olu – With a little voice

Mgbe o gara otu afo o luchara di – After a year’s anniversary of her marriage

I ga-amatakwa na o bu ya bu onye – Would you recognize her as the

na-eji olu di nwayoo ekwu? – One who used to have such soft voice?

O ka nwere ugwu na nsopuru? – Is she still respectful and courteous?

Iba mba buzi ihe e ji emerube ubochi – Rebuking becomes the order of the day

Ndi ogo ha na-abiazikwa? – Can the in-laws still come?

N’udi ihu ojoo o na-egosiputa – With her angry facial expression?

Oh! Kedu ka ike gi ga-adi – Oh! How brave will you be?

Oh! N’eziokwu omume nwaanyi a joro njo – Oh! The woman is rude indeed

Kwa ubochi tupu anyanwu alakpuo – Every day before the sun sets

I ga-ano n’ulo – You must be at home

O bu ihe a ka I ji wee luru m? – Is this the reason you married me?

I na-agakwa na nke ndi enyi gi? – Do you still visit your friends?

Mgbe obula a kporo gi, otu aziza ka I na-enye – When you get an invitation, the response is always the same

A gaghi m abianwu, o nwere ka o di – I won’t make it, I am committed

Mana ezie o nweghi ihe mgbochi di –When in reality there is no commitment.

Mgbe umunne ya biara – When her relatives visit

Ha e sie nri di uto – They fry delicious food

Ha na-eri ma nri e zoro – They eat even the food that

n'ime ulo – was hidden at the rear of the hut

Ihu nwaanyi ga-abu polina polina – The wife’s face will be cheerful.

I nweghizi onu okwu n’ulo gi – You no longer have a say in your home

O nakaria gi ugwo onwa – If she earns more than what you earn

O ga na-echi gi onu n’ala – You will be ill-treated

O nwere ike na-agwa gi na – She will even tell you that she

ya nwere ike ikwugidenu onwe ya – Can do without you.

Maka na-emeputala stov – Because stoves have been invented

A ga-akwanye gi iwa nku garuo – You will be forced to chop firewood

n'ike agwu gi? – until you are fatigued?

Nna Adamma I ga-enyere m aka saa efere – Adamma’s dad, you will help with washing the dishes

I mesia, I gaa zutara umu ihe ufodu – When you are done, you will

ebe ahu a na-ere ihe – go buy me some items at the shop.

I ga-aju? – Will you object?

I ga-arusi oru ndi a ike na nzuzo – You will just silently comply and work very hard

Mgbe iwe were ya, I gaa butere ya nri – When she is upset, you get food with no relish

A ga-agwa gi ka iriwe aso mmiri ka nri – You are told to eat saliva as savour

Mgbe I ka bu nwa okorobia – When you were still a bachelor

I na-ekwu na I gaghi ekwe nwaanyi – You use to say, I will never allow a woman

Ka o mee m etu e si eme nna Adamma – To treat me the way Adamma’s father is treated

E nwere ike jiri mma dugbuo ya – I can strangle her to death

Nwaanyi meriri ndi oka iku okpo – A woman defeated boxing champions

O meriri ndi eze – She defeated kings

O merikwara ma ndi mmadu ndi kacha nwe akunauba – She defeated even the wealthiest people

Ndi a niile enweghi ike I chere nwaanyi akamgba – All the above will never compete with a woman.

O ka mma ichefu maka olulu nwaanyi – It is better to forget about marriage

O ka mma ibu okorobia – It is better to be a bachelor

Mana o nwere ihe o ga-egbochi – But will it solve anything?

A gaghi eji maka mgbagbu ghara ije ogu – It is better to try than give up

**Themes of the poem:**

The poem warns men against the manipulative nature of women.

**Depiction of women in the poem:**

In the poem Nwaanyi (woman), the poet tells about an ideal situation of a marriage union where husband and wife are friends and lovers. He refers to the Bible story where God realized that Adam, the first man, was lonely and then created Eve from Adam’s rib to be Adam’s companion.

In the third stanza, the woman deviates from the purpose the poet suggests she was created for, namely, to be a companion to her husband. The behavior of this woman to her husband is such that she demonstrates to him that she is self-sufficient and can do without him.

A metaphor “Chineke miri nwoke otu mkpisi ngi ya” (Indeed the skin has peeled off) is used in the third line of the third stanza, to indicate that the woman has now settled down in the marriage. The word “peeling of the skin” suggests maturity, a snake, for example, goes through the process of skin peeling or shedding as it matures. The woman was created to be a man’s companion turns out to be highly manipulative. She no longer lives harmoniously with her husband. Her controlling is shown in the last line of the third stanza:

I ga-anu ebe o na-eto onu; “Ebe a bu be m – You only hear her boasting: “This is my home”

To emphasize the woman’s instability, the poet employs contrast in the third and fourth stanzas. In the third stanza, the woman’s behavior changes for the worse and in the fourth stanza the poet describes how well-behaved the woman was during the early stages of the marriage. In the third line of the fourth stanza, the ideophone “Ihunanya na-aga serere werere” (the love has a pleasant smell) suggests how peaceful and joyful the marriage was in the beginning. In the last line of the fourth stanza, the poet uses a diminutive in the phrase, “N’obere olu ya” (with her little voice), to indicate how respectful the woman used to be. She never raised her voice when speaking to her husband, which was a sung of humility and respect. Her sudden change in behavior after a year of marriage portrays an image of a great pretender.

Ka o gbachara afo ha ji luo di na nwunye – After a year’s anniversary of her marriage

I ga-echetakwa ngirigi olu ya – Will you remember her little voice?

Ugwu na nsopuru o ka di ebe o di? – Will respect and honour still be there?

Mkpari aburula ihe e ji emerube ubochi – Swearing becomes the order of the day

The word swearing in the last line above indicates a woman who has lost respect and is manipulative and a bully.

In Igbo culture, a man is the head of the family and his word is always final. In this poem, the opposite is true – the man has no say in the house, he is dictated to by his wife. The expression “I nweghizi onu okwu n’ulo gi” (You no longer have a say in your house) portrays the woman’s dominion and the man’s loss of control as the woman orders her husband to do the household chores. According to Igbo culture, all household chores should be done by the woman, hence the saying that a woman’s place is in the kitchen.

To demonstrate the power of women, the poet describes how boastful young men are before they get married, swearing that they will never allow a woman to undermine them after marriage, but because of the power of women, they cannot fulfill their bold claim. The poet ends the poem by repeating in the poem “A tukwasala nwaanyi obi” (Never trust a woman), how powerful women are, they have defeated the mightiest men on earth including kings and even boxing champions.

**Findings of the study:**

The analysis of the image of women in Igbo poetry analyze in this study revealed that gender played a crucial role in the depiction of women in the poems. The analyses also reveal biasness in the manner in which female characters were depicted. A reflection of women stereotypes was observed where women characters were depicted as gold-diggers, untrustworthy, greedy, submissive and dependent.

The biased manner, in which women were depicted in Igbo poetry revealed, confirms and promotes the patriarchal nature of the Igbo society. Contrary to the call by Western as well as African feminists for more positive images of women in literature, the poems analyzed depicted stereotype images of women. The poems analyze revealed the value of family in Igbo culture, thereby asserting the African feminists’ belief in the importance of family for society’s well-being.

Women images as depicted in this study are problematic in the sense that there is lack of realization that society has evolved over time and that there are a lot of influential women. Women in general and Igbo women in particular have grown to transcend the traditional norms of submissiveness and total dependence. There are a lot of very influential women in society, career and professional women and women who occupy even the traditionally male dominated professions. The reality is women no longer belong to the kitchen.

**CONCLUSION:**

The poems analyzed in this paper show that poets are indeed biased in their portrayal of women. Overall women are portrayed by the poets as unfaithful, gold-diggers, materialistic, dependent, lazy, housewives, betrayers, immoral and trouble-makers. These gender stereotypical images are not in line with African feminism. African feminists call for more positive images of women in literature.

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