

Non-literary Mode of Communicating Gender Differences in Igbo Plays

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Abstract

Drama performance lends itself to literary and non-literary modes of communicating gender differences. For an effective communication of desired meaning to take place in drama, the two modes have to interact. Oftentimes, analysts or critics concern themselves only with the literary mode to the neglect of the non-literary. It is against the need for an effective theatre communication that this study attempts studying the non-literary elements or devices that account for communicating gender differences in four Igbo plays: *Udo Ka Mma* by A.B. Chukuezi, *Nwata Rie Awọ* by G.O. Onyekaonwu, *Obidiya* by E. Akoma and *Nke M Ji Ka* by G.I. Nwaozuzu. The study adopts a communicative act analysis approach to analyse movements and actions, dramatic props and dreams as devices commonly used by most Igbo playwrights to realize effective meaning in dramatic performances. The study discovers that the roles of female characters in the plays determine movements and actions that inform their titles. Again, the dramatic intentional fabrics (which include props, costumes and make-up that further plots of plays) used around characters tend to mark the female characters, while unmarking the male ones. In essence, just as the literary mode of communication renders women invisible, so also does the non-literary mode.

Introduction

Gender roles and identities as explicated in the dramatic performance cannot be adequately captured unless subjected to non-verbal modes of communication analysis. A literary analysis of dramatic text alone, offers us a limited window into textual meaning, hence the need for non-textual

analysis. One's gender identity is one's deep-seated sense of maleness or femaleness. It is a reflection of an individual's labelling by others as boy or girl, man or woman, male or female. Gender role, on the other hand, refers to the extent people view themselves or are viewed by others as being masculine or feminine and playing the role(s) associated with each. Masculinity or femininity is socially defined, and varies from culture to culture. It is socio-culturally assigned gender that determines gender role as well as gender identity (Griffith and Hatfield, 1984). Gender identity or role is programmed by a complex series of biological and psychological processes: chromosomal, gonad, hormonal, morphological and assigned genders (Money and Ehrhardt, 1972). Moore (1994) advances a question-answer proposal of "who a woman (or a man) is?" for an understanding of gender types and roles. According to Moore's proposal, 'woman' or 'man' is one who has female or male biological characteristics respectively, and whose behaviour is culturally determined by gendered expectations relating to culturally and socially constructed distinctions.

Conceptual Framework

Communication is a process of sharing meanings in a discourse by participants concerned with the sending and receiving of messages. It is essential to all social life and cultural systems, so much so that it is often taken in anthropological theory to be the paradigm of all cultures and all social organizations (Seymour-Smith, 1986). According to Seymour-Smith, communication exists in two major modes: the symbolic (literary), which involves words either in a spoken or a written language, and the substantive mode (non-literary), which entails concreteness of materials. In this study, we are concerned with the substantive mode, which is the expression and modulation of gender thoughts, feelings, and emotions through movements, actions and other extra-linguistic features capable of communicating gender differences. The communication system and its modes of interaction are influenced by power. Leith (1983:147) notes that, "language has a vital part to play in the exercise of social power...the connotations that become criteria originate with the socially powerful" and which include the literary and the non-literary.

Communicating gender differences is a complex process. Different explanations have been given for its complexity. First, Lakoff's (1975) dominance theory that men have the upper hand in the use of language, and second, Maltz and Borker's (1982) two cultures theory that men and women make use of different languages offer some useful explanations. The questions that arise at this point are: Can men and women's distinctive and distinguishing modes of communication, diction and the use of

symbols or physical languages such as silences account for the differences in communicating gender? Are male and female differences marked or communicated in only one way or in varying ways? Different scholars have attempted to proffer answers to these questions. Tannen (1993) in this direction notes that the process of socialization can lead to a breakdown in both intra-gender and inter-gender communications. According to Tannen, in the conversational style, men tend to see conversations as negotiations, which they have to win through retaining the upper hand, as well as protecting themselves from others' attempt to bring them down or push them around. Women socialise by seeing the world as a community and focus on their connections, their conversations and negotiations for closeness in which individuals seek and give confirmation, affirm and support each other and reach consensus (Tannen, 1993).

Another gender communication difference according to Tannen (1993) is the use of rapport talk. The women use it to discuss similarities and match experiences while men use it to discuss knowledge and display skills. Continuing, Tannen notes that women seem to prefer discussing about their personal lives and feelings, while men prefer discussing about activities and events. A third proposal is a mixed-sex conversation where men lecture and women listen and give support. Concluding, Tannen points out that a mixed-sex conversation places the woman in a double-bind situation, because if she speaks in a way expected of a woman, then she is seen as an inadequate leader, but if she speaks in a way expected of a leader, she is seen as an inadequate woman. Tannen (1994) and, Heaton and Blake (1999) agree that men use the 'instrumental style' while the women use the 'expressive style' of communicating within and outside intra- and inter-gender borders. The instrumental style focuses on identifying goals and finding solutions while the expressive style refers to the expression of emotion, the focus being a matter of perspective and the level of sensitivity to how others feel.

Goldschmidt and Weller's (2000) analysis reveals that the emotional content of speech is significantly higher for women than for men, and this corroborates those of Tannen (1994), and Heaton and Blake (1999). Nnaemeka (1996) accuses Achebe of objectifying women in *Things Fall Apart* as going and coming with mounds of foo-foo, pots of water, market baskets, fetching of kola nuts, being scolded and beaten before they disappear behind the huts of the compounds. On the other hand, Achebe's male characters, from Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* to Ikem in *Anthills of the Savannah*, are endowed with big egos. Quseynou (1996) notes the use of oral art forms like myths, proverbs, folktales, which writers borrow and transpose into written art forms to bring to the forefront in the art of conversation and oratory. The adoption of these

cultural markers of communication, but especially through their absence, refers to linguistic or aural inconspicuousness in male characters and 'markedness' or unwelcome presence for women in African mode of communicating gender differences. For example, 'The Quarrel between Earth and Sky', 'Why the Snake-Lizard Killed His Mother' and 'The Mosquito and Ear' are used by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* to communicate differences between Okonkwo and the female characters. Finally here, Chijioke (2006) observes in *Okwu Igbo Nke Atọ* (1985), *Olu Igbo Nke Atọ* (1985) and *Ogugu Igbo 3* (1985) the sexist communication strategies employed by Igbo primer writers. Her study reveals that language activities revolve around girls playing passive and servile roles, while boys engage in active and more tasking roles. In all, the view of the relationship between gender, language and culture is aptly captured by Nhleakisana (2009:136), thus, "Gender is a socio-cultural construct, which permeates all levels of society from the domestic to the global realm, and it is overtly expressed through language".

Drama as a Performance

Drama as a performance is an integrative discipline that challenges the hierarchy of psycho-motoric, affective and cognitive skills, because in the enactment of a scene, all three are in use (Hilton, 1987). It is the only genre endowed with imitation, impersonation, and a deliberate interest in costume, modulation of voice, gesticulation and movement in rhythm with the idiosyncrasies of the characters being imitated (Nwabueze, 2005). These observations Hilton (1987) and Nwabueze (2005) highlight as important factors in an attempt to answer the question: what non-literary elements are used to communicate gender identity or role in Igbo plays? To this extent, the study looks at theatricality as movement and action, and at stagecraft with a view to identifying how they communicate gender differences, using some selected Igbo plays. Numerous Igbo plays exist, from which we would have drawn illustrations but for space and time constraint, we shall limit ourselves to only four plays; Chukuezi's (1974) *Udo Ka Mma* ('Peace is Better'), Onyekaonwu's (1980) *Nwata Rie Awọ* ('When a Child Eats the Toad...'), Nwaozuzu's (2005) *Nke M Ji Ka* ('What I Have at Hand...') and Akoma's (1979) *Obidiya* ('Her Husband's Favourite/Her Husband's Soulmate').

Plays' Synopses

Udo Ka Mma can be classified as a 'tragicomedy' and as 'vaulting ambition' using the traditionalist and thematic classificatory modes

respectively. It is tragic on account of the egotism and chauvinism that leads to loss of lives and property as two rivals Eze (King) Obiekwe and Maduka draw their communities' - Ụmuọbia and Ndiikpa- into unnecessary war and subsequent economic blockade. Obiekwe's vaulting ambition and greed lie beneath his insistence on dispossessing the less privileged, Maduka, of his ancestral land and inheritance because of its location and fertility. In spite of the fact that the king's brother and other confidants of his reiterate the fact that the king's grandfather mortgaged the land in question twice to Maduka's grandfather, he sticks to his gun. In Igbo tradition, any land mortgaged twice is as good as sold outrightly. All advices and pleas for peace fall on deaf ears. Consequently, a bloody war breaks out in which Maduka's Ndiikpa defeats King Obiekwe of Ụmuọbia. Thus, the king's selfishness overrides his sense of custodianship of his people's tradition. Obiekwe falls foul of his role as a socio-political role model. However, the conflict is resolved when Dike, Obiekwe's son, marries Egondụ, the daughter of Maduka, his father's arch-enemy. Thus, the marriage and fate of a woman are used as instrument to resolve the conflict.

Nwata Rie Awọ (Ọ Jụ Anyị) is a tragic play involving Awọrọ, Obioma and Ọdinchefu as main characters. Awọrọ, the only son of Obidike and Nwamgbogo is a stubborn flirtatious truant who runs around seducing women, especially widows, and a thorn in the lives of his parents who lament his antics every now and then. As Awọrọ defeats Akatoosi, Obioma falls in love with him at first sight. She jilts many suitors, including the last one that was to pay her bride-price the very morning she moved to Awọrọ's house. The marriage is haphazardly consummated as Awọrọ's parents force him to marry Obioma. In order to remove Obioma from his life, Awọrọ feigns food poisoning by her wife and as tradition of Abangwu people demands, Obioma and their only daughter, Ọdinchefu are sent packing to her natal home. Later, she and her daughter are abducted by Awọrọ and sold into slavery to the highest bidder. Life takes strange and unusual turns and fifteen years after, Awọrọ marries Ọdinchefu not knowing that she is his daughter. Unbeknown to anybody incest has been committed, the gods of the land inflict sickness on Awọrọ's new found love who, endures nightmares and screams in her sleep. As Awọrọ goes to the *dibia* to find out the cause of his second wife's incessant ill-health, he was told by the oracle to bring back his first wife who will then locate the whereabouts of their daughter, and solve the problem. This is done and on arrival, Obioma discovers that her co-wife is their daughter. Awọrọ commits suicide. Unlike the first play, *Udo Ka Mma* with a clear admonitory warning about egotism and political excess, the death of Awọrọ and the fates of Obioma and Ọdinchefu in

Nwata Rie Awọ (Ọ Jụ Anụ) raise questions about Onyekaeonwu's (1980) gender intentions in the play.

Obidiya is a play involving revenge tragedy arising from and associated with the inherent danger in land feuds. In this play, three main characters are identifiable, namely, Obidiya, Ọnụma and Oriakụ. Obidiya is Ọnụma's wife and the bread-winner of the family. While Obidiya goes out in order to fend for the family, Ọnụma stays at home to receive gift items her wife buys from her business trips. The couple seems close and cannot do without each other. In spite of their childlessness, the couple lives in peace and harmony until Oriakụ becomes so passionate about dispossessing Ọnụma of his land of inheritance. The land in dispute is fertile and located at a strategic position and this makes Oriakụ, a wealthy, greedy ritualist, to swear on his life to dispossess Ọnụma of this land. The land case is tried by the Ụmụegbu community's traditional court and Ọnụma wins. Oriakụ, dissatisfied with the ruling of the community's court, appealed to the now orthodox colonial court but loses again. As Ọnụma and wife contemplate how to show gratitude to the people who supported them during the turbulent period, especially the magistrate, danger comes looming. There are series of portend warnings for the whole community in the unusual sighting of a python, a black and big millipede and a viper crawling into Ọnụma's house in the day time. In other warning signs, vultures perch on house roofs while soldier ants ravage people's food causing innocent children to starve to death. These bad omens show the land was being desecrated and that the wrath of the gods is also imminent. In order to satisfy his vaulting ambition, Oriakụ resorts to jungle justice; he hires killers who assassinate Ọnụma while his wife, Obidiya is away on a business trip. Obidiya is inconsolable and seeks revenge and a violent end for Oriakụ and his entire family. However, Obidiya plays some part in the tragic deaths as the gods accomplish her goal by wiping out Oriakụ and his family, home and abroad. The play ends when the heroine, Obidiya, commits suicide in order to join her late husband, so that their love may continue uninterrupted.

Nke M Ji Ka is a story set in the colonial era to mark European colonialists' erosion of the religion, psyche and government institutions and structures in colonial Igbo society. Ugochi, the heroine, in a piqued state of self-awareness and self-rediscovery protests against obnoxious traditions of Ụmụeleme kingdom, that kept her and people of her class and ilk down and backward. The traditions range from marginalization of women for not producing male children to the depositing of twins in the evil forest. At the inception of the play, Queen Ugochi is seen lamenting because she begets no male child but females for her king who desires an heir for the throne and for the continuity of his lineage at all cost. After

several consultations with herbalists, diviners and *dibias*, and sacrifices of atonement and cleansing, her situation gets worse. All she and their four daughters receive from the king is shouting, beating and all sorts of harassment, culminating in King Onyekwere taking a second wife for the sole purpose of begetting a male child. One day, King Onyekwere's only sister, *Qgooma*, has a dream in which her brother rejected and threw out two chicks that ran into his compound. Later in the same dream, a strange man presents two bulls claiming that they belong to Onyekwere. Whilst rejecting the strange man's claim the two bulls turned into two young men. In trying her fate elsewhere, Ugochi joins the white man's (Christian) church, baptizes and changes her name to Lydia, which was misinterpreted as *o lu di ya* 'the husband of her husband', a violation of the religion of *Umueleme* kingdom. Onyekwere bans her from his compound and she runs to Pastor Daniel who sends her back to her husband arguing that the church cannot house a pregnant woman. The pastor sends away Ugochi (now Lydia and *o lu di ya*) with security escort and warning that he would deal ruthlessly with Onyekwere, should he harass his wife any further. Later in the play, Ugochi gives birth to twins named, Pita (Peter) and Pql (Paul), their birth is another abomination in the kingdom. The twins are rejected by the king and community and deposited in the evil forest. The church rescues them and the king orders the youth to burn down the church building and kill any member found there. King Onyekwere is jailed for five years with hard labour and while in prison, converts to Christianity. On gaining freedom, he changes his name to Samuel. In the church, he reunites not only with his family but also with his sons, Pita and Pql. The people of *Umueleme* demand he comes back immediately to occupy his throne and all the rights and privileges therein or else he loses them. Onyekwere in peace and contentment replies: "what I have at hand is greater than what you have to offer" and this is where the title of the play derives from.

Movement and Action

In performance, the actors in a play are rarely mundane and static. They imitate and embody the qualities of real persons they are impersonating or imitating. In acting, characters make different movements, including changing positions or locations on stage. It could also be a gradual change in attitude, opinion, perspective or anything one does or plans to do. Movement entails space and time, and related to movement is action. An action is doing something for a purpose; hence impersonation or imitation is an embodiment of action. It is also a movement or act that one can perform on a particular occasion for a particular purpose. We can

also refer to the important, exciting or significant things happening in space and time as action. It could be overt or implied. Depending on the type or genre of the drama, good dramatic action is preparatory, sincere and essential to the movement of the plot particularly, in the realization of dramatic objectives; and for this reason, it is difficult to separate movement and action into two different entities (Tennyson, 1967). Gesticulation is a type of movement that one makes with the hands or arms; it includes facial expressions used to describe something that is difficult to express in words. Movement and action are in rhythm with the idiosyncrasies of the characters being imitated or impersonated. In dramatic actions, actors use their bodies and minds in rhythmic patterns to produce actions or movements, which aggregate into authentic physical and psychological states of different men and women. The objective of this work is to demonstrate how different paralinguistic movements by actors communicate different contextual meanings.

Physical Movements and Actions

Chukuezi's *Udo Ka Mma* ('Peace is Better') exposes a major incident where King Obiekwe and Maduka are engrossed in a land feud. The conflict draws attention to the roles played by wives or women in order to avert war and its attendant consequences, hence Obidiya inquires,

Obiekwe nna anyi, nke a ihu di gi otu a?

(*O wee welite olu ya n'uwe.*) O bu maka ala Uhu Umuezeukwu. Maduka na ndi otu ya! (*O gwuzoro otu duq isi si:*) Eziokwu, aga m eme ha otu n'obodo a(8).

Obiekwe, our master, why do you look so downcast?

(*He raises his voice in anger.*) It is that land at Uhu Umuezeukwu. Maduka and his people! (*He stands and swears.*) Truly, I will deal with them ruthlessly in this town.)

In a family setting, when a man, in the role of the head is upset, every other family member is affected, particularly his wife, and this prompts Obidiya's inquiry. In Igbo society, it is common to expect the presence and gentle coaxing by wives to minimize stress on their husbands. The inherent danger in the land feud in the play comes from King Obiekwe (meaning 'vaulting ambition of the heart') and Maduka (meaning 'he who has people is greater than he who has none') as the former develops a strong desire for the latter's ancestral land. The movements of the actors highlight the destruction land feud has done to the socio-economic and political relationships built over the years between the people of

Ụmụọbịa and Ndiikpa, and to the extent of wiping out many families in both communities. In this situation the physical and psychological actions foreshadow impending catastrophe as King Obiekwe rejects every advice and overtures for peace, on the excuse that he cannot bring himself low for his kinsmen to show him the boundary of his father's land. The queen, Obidiya, like the contemporary "first ladies" tries to influence the king's position, all to no avail (8). She advises the king to consult with the elders of the land for proper adjudication and she gets the following in return.

(N'íwe) Taa nwaanyị mechie ọnu gị...Obidiya, ị leliala m (O wee gwuzo ọtọ bawara Obidiya mba). I kwuo ụdị okwu a ọzọ gị alaa be nna gị... (9).	(In a rage) Shut up woman, you have insulted me (Stands up and scolds Obidi- ya). If you try this again, I will send you packing to your father's household...)
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However, land has been a major source of conflict in Igbo society and elsewhere, especially where the demand for it is greater than its supply. Like Calpurnia in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Obidiya is silenced simply for being out of step and daring to counsel her husband.

According to the stage directions, Obiekwe stands up in a rage to swear, to threaten and to scold. His idiosyncrasies and physical performance are intended not only to dwarf the person and idea of Obidiya, but also to demonstrate his superiority over her as he threatens to send her packing. In Igbo culture, divorce is easier said than done and when a woman is threatened with packing, she may or may not be moved depending on her procreative standing, but Obidiya does not conform to this stereotype. The process of divorce in Igbo society is complex, especially where the woman begets a male child because her son has all the rights and privileges to bring her into his own compound if or when he owns any. The silences identifiable in *Udo Ka Mma* and other Igbo plays reveal the uncertainties surrounding the norms in inter-gender communication especially, when classified information as demonstrated in the true ownership of the disputed land, is involved. Obiekwe ignores advice and goes to war in which he is defeated. His only son falls in love with Maduka's only daughter (44) and they marry. This brings peace and harmony back to the warring communities of Ụmụọbịa and Ndiikpa (88), hence the title of the play, *Udo Ka Mma* 'Peace is a sine qua non to living'. In the play, marriage is exploited for the purpose of conflict resolution.

Obidiya exposes movements and actions that amount to extra-gender role. Extra-gender role here refers to role that is not originally, either socio-biologically or socio-culturally assigned to the particular gender

(Ikeokwu, 2008). Obidiya, the wife of Ọnụma, becomes the bread-winner of her family while her husband is alive and not incapacitated in any way. She advises and provides security for her husband as well as buys *ihe ahịa* “gifts”. No one knows if it is laziness or fear of the unknown that makes Ọnụma to abandon his ‘manly’ duties to his wife, a condition the Igbo consider a deviation from the norm. As Ọnụma defeats Oriakụ in the land case in both courts, Oriakụ hires assassins who eliminate Ọnụma. In revenge, Obidiya employs the services of the same assassins in order to destroy Oriakụ and his family. The four plays are structured in a cause-and-effect plot development with their prologues or introductions establishing the settings, the characters, and in many respects, steering the audience expectation of the plot in a linear manner. For example, at the end of *Okwu Mbuuzọ* (Prologue) in *Udo Ka Mma*, and *Okwu Mmalite* (Introduction) in *Nke M Ji Ka*, we observe a symbolic call or appeal to the audience to watch out for details of incidents in the plays thus:

Ihe ka nte esokwutela nte n’ọnụ ya.
Tụfịa, Chukwu ekwela! (*Udo Ka Mma*:
6),

Ndị be anyị, ihe ka nte abakwute nte
n’ọnụ, ka anyị mara ihe ya na nte ga-
eme (*Nke M Ji Ka*: iii),

(What is greater than the ant has met it
in its hole. No, God will not allow it to
happen!

(Our people, what is greater than the
ant has entered its hole. Let us watch
and see what it and the ant are going
to do)

The above scene-setting introductions draw attention in a gestural manner to the major incidents expected in the plays. They are signed dramatic intent designed to keep the audience in suspense. Their intentionality lies in the conflict of male and female principles, and the concomitant reformations the women bring to bear on their respective spouses as well as their communities. Obidiya (*Udo Ka Mma*) pressures Obiekwe to allow their son, Dike, to marry Egondụ, the daughter of his father’s arch-enemy, a move that resolves the conflict. In *Nke M Ji Ka*, the queen transforms her king and the kingdom of Ụmụeleme and ostensibly from their indigenous religious practices and superstitious beliefs to Christianity. The major movements in the plays intermingle with the minor ones to enunciate the Igbo worldview about marriage and its fulfilment. That is, marriage must be procreative in such a manner that lineage continuity is ensured. Lineage continuity in this context can only be ensured through the presence of male children, not by female children viewed as *ama ndị ọzọ* (*Nke M Ji Ka*: 2) ‘Other people’s households’.

In *Nwata Rie Awọ* (*Ọ Jụ Anụ*) 'When a child eats the toad (he/she rejects meat)' Onyekaaonwu communicates how members of both genders leave the substance in pursuit of shadows. Awọrọ and Obioma have in their various situations abandoned the normal for the abnormal. For instance Awọrọ, a famous wrestler like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, abandons his wife, Obioma, in preference to sleeping around with his numerous concubines every other day, an act that is in some respects synonymous with eating the toad and rejecting the meat (50). Awọrọ abducts and sells his wife and daughter into slavery. At the end, he commits incest with his daughter, Ọdinchefu, and as he discovers it, he commits suicide – also a kind of eating the toad and rejecting the meat. On the other hand, Obioma rejects many suitors, which paves way for Awọrọ into her life. Obioma's girl friend, Ekemma, and her father, Okwukogu highlight the movement thus:

Ogba nhọ di aghaghị iluta eke ogba... i
jula Obi, chuo Chike gbanahu Oti, hapu
Eke. Ugbu a Anene eluwala gi ilu (33).

(One who rejects suitors marries the
python... You reject Obi, drive away
Chike, run from Oti, abandon Eke,
and now Anene tastes bitter.

Kama na ihe a ga-amata bu mkpi
mbugowe adighi agba. Agbagoro
agbagoro wee rigochaa elu, o rukwe na
nrida ya, gbagogbago aghaghị idi ya (38).

(A forced he-goat does not experi-
ence erection. If a crooked way is
followed climbing up, crookedness is
also followed when climbing down.)

In *Udo Ka Mma* and *Nwata Rie Awọ*, public strife and mayhem become the platform for movement and action. The point here is that the absence of the man or the woman in a home creates a vacuum, which the widow or the widower remembers at certain critical points. In extreme cases, widows are subjected to dehumanizing tortures or oath swearing by their spouse families either to indict or vindicate them of their husbands' death. However, widowhood or widower-hood is a major movement in an individual's life that may lead to remarrying or assuming extra gender roles.

Symbolic or Psychological Exile

We have been discussing in the plays, an exile that involves moving from one spatial entity to another as the women, especially battle their way through unfamiliar territory created by patriarchy and social gender constructs. There is another type referred to as symbolic or psychological exile. It involves liberation from deep negative emotional feelings or

depression to a life of freedom characterized by self-fulfilment. In *Nke M Ji Ka*, King Onyekwere in consonance with the tradition of Ụmụeleme people abandons his and Ugochi's twin boys in the evil forest despite many years longing for a male child (65). The church rescues the twins—Pita and Pọl - and this kindles the king's anger. He orders the youths to burn down the church and kill the congregation. He is sentenced to five years imprisonment, during which he is converted to Christianity. Although the killing and abandoning of twins have long ceased in Igbo society and most of Africa, the incident throws some light on the cultural roots of patriarchy and gender imbalance. Thus, although the king and the queen escape from obnoxious tradition to a Christian and modern way of life, which assures them lineage continuity (94), their actions, especially the king's, are unacceptable. The play fails to deal with the problems of gender imbalance; the king's conversion to Christianity may be real but his actions alone may have signalled a different future without really addressing the various problems propped up by cultural norms and his rule. King Onyekwere is liberated from his former life experiences to new ones. He no longer traumatizes his wife and daughters for lack of male children but hugs them; he no longer intimidates and scares them but loves and cherishes them. He expresses this new life experiences thus, *Chineke kere ụwa, e – etu a ka ihunanya na ebere gị si adị? Biko gbaghara ekweghi ekwe m* (95) ['God, who created the world, is this how your love and kindness are? Please, forgive my unbelief.'] In other words, Onyekwere escapes from lack of a male child to abundance of male children, from lineage extinction to lineage continuity and from war in the family to peace.

Dramatic Props/Objects

Stagecraft and its management, in addition to making use of "language of action, language of sound", makes use of "language of physical objects" referred to as props (Brook, 1990:55). That is, objects that communicate or suggest meaning. Brook categorizes these objects into the dramatic non-intentional objects and dramatic intentional objects. Dramatic non-intentional objects or symbols refer to those objects, which do not further the plot of the play in any way, or help in creating mood. Their absence does not hamper the free movement of the play. Dramatic intentional objects, on their part, have significant values and they generally draw audience's attention to significant meanings on stage. They usually have negative effects on the spine or plot of a play if removed. In other words, they further the plot of plays. However, an object can only be classified as dramatic non-intentional or dramatic intentional within a given context,

for what is intentional in one situation could be non-intentional in another situation. The following stage direction from *Obidiya* illustrates this point;

(Ọnụma nọ n'ụlọ na-abọ isi, chepu azụ n'ezi. Ndị ogbu isi abata kuo ya okpiri n'olu, were akwa kechie ya ọny, buru ya puo. A ga-emenyụ oku ugbu a, tie egwu iru uju...anya mmiri, egwu e ji ebu ozu,..nke ga-eme ndi mmadu chee echiche. Obidiya ga-abata burukwa abo n'isi, na ihe niile o zutara n'ahia. O ga-edebe ha n'ala gagharja, legharja. anya (23).

(Ọnụma backs outside while combing his hair. The assassins enter, knock and hit him with a club, stuffing his mouth with a cloth, and carry his corpse away. Light fades out and dirge music begins to play, which arouses people's emotion or thought. Obidiya enters, carrying a long basket and the things she bought from the market. She puts them down, moves and looks around)

OBIDIYA: O lee ebe nwoke a nọ? O ga-asị na ya amaghị na m alọtala? Ọnụma! Ọnụma! Ọnụma e e e! Ọnụma e e e! Ọnụma e e e! Ọ gara ole ebe n'abalị a? Nwanne Ọnụma eee! (*O mụnye ihe oku, lee ebe niile, hụ ọbara n'ala, na iperipe akwa ya togboro n'ala. Ujọ eju ya ahụ. O legharja anya, tie mkpu*) Ha egbuole ya. Ndị iro egbuole ya. E gbuola nwa mkpi izuzu alala. Ihe a bụ ọbara mmadu, nke a bụ akwa jioji ya o gba oge m na-aga ahia. Onye gburu Ọnụma di m? O riri ji onye? Onye ka o riri ede ya? Mụ na onye ga-ebi? Nwaanyi o na-ebichi okpu ụlọ? Enweghi m nne, agba m aka nna. Aga m ala ebee? O gburu Ọnụma egbuole m. Ya bia were m. Ihe a o bụ ndu?... Ọnụma ekele m obi! (24).

OBIDIYA: (Where is this man? Will he say he doesn't know I am back? Ọnụma! Ọnụma! Ọnụma e e e! Ọnụma e e e! Ọnụma e e e! Where has he gone to this night? Ọnụma's brother e e e! (*She puts on the light, looks everywhere, sees a pool of blood on the floor, and his George wrapper on the floor. Fear runs through her body. She looks around and screams*). They have killed him! Enemies have killed him! When the he-goat is killed, all secret meetings will end. This is human blood; this is the George wrapper he was tying when I left for the market. Who killed Ọnụma my husband? Whose yam has he eaten? Whose cocoyam has he eaten? Whom am I going to live with? Does a woman occupy a compound? I don't have a mother, I am fatherless. Where do I go from here? He that has killed Ọnụma has also killed me. Let him come and take me as well. Is this life? ... Grief has taken me over.)

The dramatic intentional objects here are the long basket, containing Obidiya's wares to and from distant markets. Others are the blood and George wrapper on the floor, while the club, comb and the cloth used in stuffing Onuma's mouth are all dramatic non-international objects. The difference between the two sets of objects is that while the latter set can be done away with, the former 'blood and wrapper on the floor' cannot because they give Obidiya clues to her husband's fate as well as the suspense created by the disappearance of his corpse. The object of 'lighting the house' is also intentional in order to make sure that her husband is not playing any pranks on her for returning late. It also functions as a device to clear all possible doubts. After her confirmation that all was not well, her screams lead to the interpolation of exclamations and interrogations, which culminates into elegy. However, the interplay of different significations of the intentional objects and their concomitant pointer to her intense grief creates an avenue for Obidiya to express her love to her husband, and seek revenge.

The dramatic intentional objects combine images with ideas. They could refer to props, costumes, make-up or scenery. In some cases however, a dramatic intentional object is expressed through what is called the language of physical symbol. They suggest meaning beyond themselves. Our concern here is the dramatic intentional objects, which are categorized into non-metaphoric and metaphoric symbols. The non-metaphoric symbols are those symbols that have only one identity, and which are used by playwrights to further dramatic plot, create mood and characterization. In the example of stage direction above, non-metaphoric symbols create and sustain mood for weeping, agony and sympathy for Obidiya because she is reminded of her childlessness, loneliness and the sudden disappearance of her spouse.

In *Nke M Ji Ka* (34), Achalu gossips with Ugochi's name in order to get the favour of their husband. The following stage direction and dialogue buttress this point.

(*N'obi eze, eze na nwunye ya nke abuo no* (*In the sitting room, the king chats with*
na-akpa nkata. Oku ga-egosi ututu (34) *his second wife. Morning time'.*)

Antagonism is a common characteristic of co-wives in polygamous homes. Chukuezi (1979) buttresses it when the playwright informs us through the character Akujuobi that Chimma his sixth wife quarrels with her co-wives every other day (7).

Nke M Ji Ka provides the audiences with a situation that integrates all the aspects of dramatic intentional objects at a glance, thus:

(N'ime aḡo ọhịa, a nū ube anuọhịa dī iche iche. Ụmụ okorobia abụọ kpụ ọmụ n'ọmụ. Otu n'ime ha bu ụmụ ejima nọ n'ọkpokoro ite. Onye isi ala bu ite ọgwụ bu ụzọ. Nwa okorobia bu ụmụ ejima ahụ esowe ya, Ugochi esonye. E tere ya unyi n' ihu, yiwe ya nkiriaka akwa. Nwa okorobia nke ọzọ so Ugochi n'azụ ji nwa uriom ọkụkọ a manyere n' ọmụ. Ha nīle abata. Ọkụ ga-egosi etiti abalị).

(In the evil forest, sounds of different animals are heard. Two young men with tender palm fronds between their lips. The priest carries medicine pot leading the way, followed by one carrying the broken pot of twins. Ugochi follows; face smeared with charcoal solution, body wrapped in tattered cloth. The young man following Ugochi holds a chick tied with tender palm frond. All enter the stage. Lighting will show midnight time.)

The dramatic intentional props here are the *tender palm fronds* and the *chick*, the costume is the tattered cloth and make-up, the charcoal solution smeared on Ugochi's face. The scenic description of the evil forest, sounds of different types of animals and lighting showing midnight time are also dramatic intentional. The tender palm frond symbolizes danger while the chick suggests a scapegoat, which carries one's sins away, hence the priest beats Ugochi with the chick and tender palm fronds; this ritual act transfers Ugochi's 'guilt' for bearing twins to the scapegoat. Thus, while the actions of the priest are designed to exculpate Ugochi who is later pronounced cleansed, the play's attack on gender imbalance is equally pronounced in the absence of the king, an important player and arguably the most 'guilty' party in the birth of the twins.

The 'charcoal solution' is a marker of guilt or sin in Ugochi; hence the priest washes her face and pronounces her guiltless or sinless. In terms of costume, the 'tattered wrapper' or cloth signifies penitence, the sober mood of a sinner. In terms of scenic effect, 'the evil forest' and 'the sounds made by different animals' coupled with 'the lighting', suggest the darkness of evil as well as that of midnight. All these aggregate to create a weird situation that accompanies the cleansing activity. Such an activity is carried out in the dead of the night when it is believed that the gods come around to take sacrifices. Apart from the animal sounds, which is dramatic non-intentional, others are dramatic intentional objects. If the sound is removed, it does not affect the plot of the play because it could be represented with plastic sound effect. On the other hand, the dramatic intentional objects, say 'the twins in the broken earthen pot', if removed, will disrupt the fabric of the play, in the sense that there will be no rescue mission, burning down of the church premises or the conversion of King Onyekwere to Christianity.

Dreams

In *Nke M Ji Ka*, we see Ọgọoma, the only daughter to the family dreaming about the future of the family (11). She travels to her natal home one early morning to share her dreams with her brother, King Onyekwere. The dramatic intention of the dream is to give King Onyekwere a preview and warning of what is about to happen in his kingdom. The characters, actions and objects of the dream are intentional stage-craft used to corroborate life realities. The dream's summary explains the following equation, thus:

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|--|---|
| i) Two chicks run into the compound as rain beats them. | Male twins as taboo in Ụmụeleme tradition are born into the king's family. |
| ii) The chicks are put in a broken earthen pot and thrown away. | The axe of tradition falls on the twins and they are abandoned in the evil forest. |
| iii) An unknown man brings two bulls and insists they are the king's, the bulls turn into young men. | The church rescues Peter and Paul who grow into young men that continue the family's lineage. |

Interestingly enough, the dream of Ọgọoma in this context is a positive foreshadow of the future because it portends the solution to the play's main subject, the lack of a male child. It also portends lineage continuity for Onyekwere. The two dreams by Obioma in *Nwata Rie Awo* (50) and Ọdinchefu (60) are negative omens and insight into the punishment for misdemeanour. However, the *Nwata Rie Awo* examples portray a situation where the dreamers happen to be the direct victims of the portent. The first dreamer here is Obioma, while the second is Ọdinchefu. The dreams correspond to what later happened to them and they suggest the following:

- | | |
|--|---|
| i) Going to search for mushrooms on the top of a hill with other women. | Awọrọ is the mushroom, the other women - those he prefers to his wife. |
| ii) The seven headed spirit and one eye touches Obioma as others escape. | Obioma is accused of poisoning, and abducted with her daughter. |
| iii) She eventually gets to the hill top and slips off into the valley where a cluster of spirits beat her to death. | She pays for 'choosiness' by marrying the same man with her daughter. Awọrọ commits incest and suicide. |

Qđinchefu's dream corroborates the cries of the symbolic *Ajọ nnụnụ* [Evil bird] (42-44), which all together inform us about the gender violence, fractures and abuse Obioma and Qđinchefu experienced in the hands of Awọrọ. The dream motive is a poetic justice, which has already taken its toll on Obioma (Qđinchefu's mother) as her dream suggests. Qđinchefu's dream is a follow-up to Obioma's, for the recurrent death motif in her incessant dreams is the message of incest and suicide Awọrọ commits. The poetic justice is inescapable; hence Qđinchefu is tossed about from one spirit to another in her dream.

In all the illustrations above, dramatic intentional and non-intentional objects or non-objects appear a necessary element in the spine of indigenous and modern African dramatic cultures. Although movement and action or stagecraft is necessary for an effective theatre, they nevertheless can fulfil the most important theatrical components or all that need to be studied in non-verbal communication in theatre. This study attempts only an investigation and analysis of non-literary mode of communicating gender differences in Igbo language drama, but not the literary mode in which drama is regarded as literature.

Conclusion

It is the roles of the female characters in the plots of the analysed plays that determine the movements and actions couched or expressed in the titles of the plays. Okwerekediya (50) and Obidiya (76) in *Udo Ka Mma* are of the view that the marriage between Dike and Egondụ will bring peace between the warring communities. In *Nwata Rie Awo*, Obioma (33), Amangwu women (50) and Qđinchefu (64) are behind the proverbial movement of 'eating toad and rejecting meat'. Ugochi in *Nke M Ji Ka* gives birth to male twins that are abandoned in the evil forest and rescued by the church to ultimately continue Onyekwere's lineage, hence the title of the play. The male characters oppose all female principles in the plays studied. Obiekwe in *Udo Ka Mma*, Onyekwere in *Nke M Ji Ka*, Awọrọ in *Nwata Rie Awo* and others are indicted by their responses to one form of female principle or the other.

In all the plays, the instrumental style of communication used by male characters and the expressive style used by female characters reveal how dramatic objects and movements express and inform the actions of characters of each gender, the analysis of the plays lend credence to this claim. In *Nke M Ji Ka*, for example, consider the cleansing materials used on Ugochi, because Onyekwere desires a son. Also consider how Awọrọ in *Nwata Rie Awo* feigns food poisoning and abducts Obioma and their daughter, because of his infidelity. All the dreams recorded in the plays

are by female characters only, no male character dreamt. While this is no doubt a coincidence, but it is also possible that the playwrights link societal transformation and change with women's dreams of a different and new social gender order as the examples in the section of dreams above demonstrate.

In conclusion, women tend to have more intercourse with nature in seeing realities of life more than men. Just as verbal (literary) mode of communication tends to render women invisible, so does the non-verbal (non-literary) mode. In fact, dramatic intentional props or fabrics used around female characters perpetuate the negative representation of women and their relegation only to the domestic sphere, while men occupy the public sphere.

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