



THERAPOETICS: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF THE HUMANITIES

ISBN: 2971-575X
Volume 4, No 1, August 2025

Therapoetics: International Journal of The Humanities

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or in any information storage and retrieval from without the permission of the Editor-in-Chief, *Therapoetics: An International Journal of the Humanities*

Email: therapoetics.kontein@gmail.com
www.therapoetics.info
Phone/WhatsApp +2348052812242

Editor-in-Chief
Professor Kontein Trinya
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt

ISSN:2971-575X
Volume 4, No 1, August 2025

EDITORIAL TEAM

Professor Kontein Trinya	Editor-in-Chief
Professor Godwin B. Okon	Editor
Professor Michael A. Nwala	Editor
Professor Ibiere Ken-Maduako	Editor
Professor Psalms Chinaka	Editor
Professor Christopher I. Ochonogor	Editor

Editorial Advisory Board

Professor Kontein Trinya, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
Professor Joseph B. Kinanee, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
Professor Joseph A. Ushie, University of Uyo, Nigeira
Professor Vincent Asuru, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria
Professor Christopher I. Ochonogor, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Secretary to the Editorial Board

Progress Umor DANIEL, PhD, SACCE
progress.umor@iaue.edu.ng
+2348063507748

About the Journal

Therapoetics: International Journal of the Humanities is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Professor Kontein Trinya International Conference at the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Humanities, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Papers presented during the annual Professor Kontein Trinya International Conference are published in a conference edition. The journal receives multi-disciplinary articles from scholars on the dynamics of affective art, language and communication studies. Its key focus is the advancing the scholarly works and thoughts of Professor Kontein Trinya. The editions shall be available in print as well as in e-copies at the conference website. Authors shall receive a complimentary print copy of the edition in which their article appears.

Guideline for submission of articles

1. Papers should bear the title, name of author(s), institutional affiliation(s), email address(s) and phone number(s) on the cover page. Each paper must be accompanied with an abstract.
2. Recommended font and size would be 12pt Times New Roman, in double line spacing, except the abstract and reference pages. Submissions should not exceed 18 pages, including the abstract and reference pages.
3. Given the multidisciplinary posture of the journal, reference style shall be the most current APA and MLA style.

Submission

All submissions should be made electronically as Microsoft Word documents sent to: therapoetics.kontein@gmail.com. Authors who submit or present papers during the annual international conference will pay N10,000.00 for assessment of their papers and N30,000.00 for publication in the journal, while non-conference participants shall pay N10,000.00 for assessment and N40,000.00 per publication of their articles. The bank details are:

Account name:	Professor Kontein Trinya International Symposium
Account number:	5600897220
Bank:	Fidelity Bank Plc.

Articles are received and reviewed all year round for the non-conference edition published in June. The conference edition is published in December. All scripts will undergo blind peer reviews.

Table of Content

Interpersonal Exchange and the Therapoetics Discourse by Progress Umor DANIEL, PhD, and Naomi C. CHIMENE –WALI	1 – 11
The Cartography of Pain in Bessie Head's <i>Maru</i> : A Psycho-Postcolonial and African Feminist Reading by Peace Ibalá AMALA, PhD, and Felicia Ukachi Eze-Dike (PhD)	12 – 23
Melodic Healing: Music and Movement in Traumatic Recovery Its Power in Exorcism by By Barnabas KOMI	23 – 33
Laughter as Therapy: Satirical Catharsis and Emotional Release in <i>Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again</i> by Peace Ibalá AMALA and Blessing Omofowe ODHE	34 – 41
Healing Through Telling: Displacement, Memory, and the Personal Narrative in Clemantine Wamariya's <i>The Girl Who Smiled Beads</i> by Rita Emonena OTUTU-FLO	42 – 50
Creative Expressions and Mental Healing: The Intersection of Art and Medicine by Ugochukwu Kingsley NWOMBU, PhD	51 – 54
The Power of A Spoken Word by Harrison Iweka NWACHUKWU, PhD & Dickson Alexander YOUNGMAN	55 – 68
Produce politics, exploitation and protest in Helon Habila's Fiction by Baribor Joel LEBE, PhD	69 – 78
Niger Delta literature: Origins, propagation, processes and prospects by Baribor Joel LEBE, PhD	79 – 90
Revolutionary Pressure in Theme and Characterization in Ngugi's <i>Petals Of Blood</i> by Nsan Eneyo And Atankere John Otokwala	91 - 100
Revolutionary Pressure in Theme and Characterization in Ngugi's <i>Petals Of Blood</i> by Nsan Eneyo And Atankere John Otokwala	101 - 115

INTERPERSONAL EXCHANGE AND THE THERAPOETICS DISCOURSE

By

Progress U. DANIEL, *PhD*

Department of English and Communication Art

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

progress.umor@iaue.edu.ng danielumor@gmail.com

08063507748, 08052812242

And

Naomi C. CHIMENE -WALI

naomi.chimene-wali@ust.edu.ng

Department of English and Literary Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Rivers State University

Nkpolu- Oroworukwo

Port Harcourt,

ABSTRACT

Communication at all levels helps to build new and improved habits with a better goal, developing relationships, revealing information and feelings to one another, thereby redefining changes throughout our lives through interactions among others using language that creates an effective climate for the overall feeling or emotional mood of the individual. This paper seeks to examine the interpersonal and therapoetics communication skills that affect positive communication creating healing among individuals using the Affection Exchange theory. The qualitative research method was adopted using field observation and case studies. The findings revealed that personal identity increases personal reproductive opportunities thereby creating room for tolerance. It also creates a connection between individuals that will improve access to material and emotional resources that will lead to the survival of all. The study recommended that there is a need for individuals to consciously improve their affective therapy.

Keywords: Improvement, Affective, Interpersonal, Therapoetics, Communication skill

INTRODUCTION

The use of language at every level for effective communication is fundamental for which humans exist as it promotes and encourages peaceful co-existence among members of the society leading to sustainable development as communication creates awareness and information develops or changes an image or mindset leading to the change of attitude which is based on the source to the receiver. This could be achieved mostly in a face-to-face situation which makes it possible for feedback to be immediate. This is based on the fact that most time, these individuals have knowledge of each other and their communication engagement at some points is in an assembled place at times or through digitally enabled and feedback is also immediate. Furthermore, this could also be achieved through a public address system or any other device that can enhance the information exchange through point-to-point communication to a mass audience.

Interpersonal exchange and the therapoetics discourse can be viewed from the ways and manner of communication between two or more individuals to accomplish setting personal or cooperative goals using verbal and nonverbal communication. Most of the time, in a, cooperate environment the manner and method by which these messages are produced and transmitted from the sender to the receiver and other means of interpersonal communication could be through the memo, public relations, and cooperate branding.

Ilhan and Erbas (2016) rightly pointed out that everyone should know how to communicate and carry one's knowledge and expectation into a bear in practice is the beginning of solving communication problems based on the different conceptions of knowledge. Adding that, from the social-cultural perspective communication should be seen as a process which should be conceptualized by every individual in knowing how to talk and when to talk evaluation of individual at every given state or time. As such the message should be clear and easy to understand by the recipient.

In an African setting, customs, tradition and culture play host to the method and manner for which communication can be effective and these essentially make them highly effective enduring in the dissemination of information personally, inter-personally and through group communication (Asemah, et al, 2021) but Ochonogor (2022) affirmed that the evolution of digital media has changed the ways of life, as digital platforms are recasting the relationship between individuals at all levels in the society.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In a civilized society in a situation of arrest by the police one of their common languages is that “you are under arrest and that you have the right to remain silent as whatever you say shall be used against you in the law court...” in a medical situation, the doctors and medical officers will give you hope with words like “don't worry you will be fine, he/she will be fine, don't worry... This illness, you will come out of it, just take your medication rightly”. There is a common saying that mind how you talk and when to talk as what you say can destroy or set a community on fire. To a dying soul, hopeful communication therapy and relations are key and it is considered to be one of the core element in the medical ethical principles as good communication have multiple impacts as it improved the medical, functionality and emotional condition of the patients and by extension the relatives of the patients, leading to compliance with the medical treatment, thereby reducing the risks of medical misconduct thereby building trust.

From the foregoing, none of the studies conducted has looked at the interpersonal exchange and therapoetics discourse. Hence, to fill this gap, this research will evaluate interpersonal exchange and therapoetics discourse. It is on this basis that the study seeks to find out how interpersonal communication and self-therapy can lead to healing.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives guided the study:

1. determine the types of spoken words that help in the healing process
2. examine how the tone and mood of the speaker help in assuaging ailments;
3. find out how space and time in spoken communication contribute to the healing process;
4. ascertain the influence of words in the healing processes of individuals

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal exchange

Asak and Ohiaggu (2013) noted that the interpersonal exchange of information is not just the giving of information but a piece of understandable information that the receiver receives and understands the message through interactions between the sender and the receiver which could be verbal or non-verbal, creating a see-saw exchange among them. Baran (2013) added that interpretation and feedback in most cases are immediate because of their level of sharing of meaning between the sender and the receiver with less interference. Furthermore, the interpersonal exchange is often face-to-face significant, promising and even more exploratory with less demanding sharing of meaning as both have almost the same level of understanding of themselves and their environment.

Wood (2016) affirmed that sometimes the interpersonal exchange exists in a range, from very unfriendly to highly personal. Citing Mead (1934) Wood (2016) noted that personal exchange is a result of communication between two individuals and as parents talk to their children and change occurs, leading to seeing our lives through others exchanging important fundamentals and self-concepts. This means that communication between interpersonal is dramatic as the mental and psychological development is interchanged during the processes of communication with the language that is known to both. Furthermore, communications with others do not only affect the individual exchange but create a sense of identity that is dramatically influenced by either the physical presence or the use of technological devices in their communication as it affects not just their emotional well-being but all around development thereby promoting health and healing, reducing anxiety and depressions.

The results for peaceful healing in communication between two individuals are based on engagement in human relations through interpersonal relationships as face-to-face cause more understanding and feedback to take place. Interpersonal is flexible as the countenance resistance is automatic in most cases, giving immediate rewards, as compliance or non-compliances are also expressed, pleasurable or displeasure and the receiver of the message can give immediate feedback thereby reducing uncertainty from both the sender and the receiver of the message (Van DEN BAN, 2008). This also falls in line with Wood's (2016) position that the more individuals interact within themselves as distinct individuals, the more positive and healthy

relationships and communication take place thereby developing intimacy and fashioning the relationship to meet the challenges of individual needs and developmental goals through the use of friendly words.

Ryff and Singer (2000) cited in Hargie (2021) noted that for there to be a developing society the channel and method of communication must be cordial and that individuals have to commune with each other. Pointing out that, there are three base needs of every individual which can be achieved through interpersonal such: competence, relatedness and autonomy. Furthermore, at the competence level, the individual needs involve the wish to feel confident and effective in carrying out actions to achieve one's goals. At the relatedness needs, the reflections on the desire to have a close connection and positive relationship with a significant relationship with other and at the autonomy levels, individuals want to feel in control of their destiny, rather than being directed by others. Therefore, to meet the desires and desirable needs of every individual, one-on-one plays a vital role as both the sender and the receiver have the same sharing of meaning which could be verbal or nonverbal symbols and signs as information exchange is a basic human function in which individuals request, provide and exchange information with the goal to reducing uncertainty (Communication theory 2013).

During the interpersonal exchange, individuals are not faced with problems of predicting only the present and past behaviours but can explain why individuals behave or believe in the way that they do and interpretation is immediate and provide alternatives if the need be. For the fact that communication fulfils several very important factions, the interpersonal exchange is usually personalized as feedback is immediate (Ndolo, 2006). Brooks (2009) affirmed that the immediate response portrays the attitude of the individual towards each other if there is acceptance, liking or hate and love as such, the response is most frequent and creates room for easy understanding as both use the language of common understanding. Adding that exchange follows based on one's liking of another person which could be characterized by the individual's behaviour and the important role that will lead to attraction. Most of the time these do not lie in the eyes of the beholder but can be viewed from the level of interpersonal attraction as qualities of the attracted as well as the quality of the attractor.

Therapoetics Intonation and Relationship Discourse

Abbah (2021) avers that art of communication as a therapy addresses issues in human society even in post-traumatic stress disorders as it releases healing and at some points, it creates rooms to share personal experiences that may address individual concerns. Therapoetics at the interpersonal exchange from an unfamiliar person has qualities that could be derived from functions of developing relationships that could lead to better treatment through closeness and information exchange, accidental happenings such as running into someone for the first time and having fruitful deliberations, the similarity of personality and similarity of attitude. These may occur when the individual feels that the social needs communication is duly fulfilled

having a sense of belonging (inclusion), the desire that each can influence the other with some sense of control of things that should happen (control) and the desire to have cared and to be loved via visa (affection) (Ndolo 2006).

Trinya (2019) noted that most times that inclusion, control and affection are based on the response given in the communication discussion that could be healing or healthier or palliation that comes from the communication that is emotional. Ken-Maduako (2022) affirmed that the interpersonal communication utterance of words many of the time means much not only to the speaker but also to the receiver as such the entrance of the words gives life even to the dying soul (Psalm 119:130) as words can kill and can make alive. Numbere (2011) affirmed that whether the words are divine or not, they have an impact and effects both the sender and the receiver as words bounce back to the speaker. Pointing out that when parents pronounce curses to children and people in later life are affected negatively not just by the receiver only but the society in general. Noting that words are life and they have all the characteristics of living things.

The Wounded Soul

Myss (2014) pointed out that in the world in general that people go about with wounds of various kinds such as words that can kill without a gun and can make alive, pointing out that healing is a social phenomenon which can be either physical or emotional with a manipulative value. Stating that individuals most times like to focus and stay on their wounds with anger, guilt, and powerlessness, believing that nothing can be done or no one can get total healing. Furthermore, Myss noted that individuals can be healed progressively with encouragement and that the patients should consider what they can do that will aid their healing process by integrating their mind, body and spirit.

Babalola (2014) investigated the effects of intonation variants on the language of wider communication in a multi-lingual environment. The study examined the intonation with the various degree of manipulation given to the tone of the voice of the speaker indicating that the intonation reveals the different mood of the speakers in the sentence in the speech, the tones for declaration, imperative, interrogative subjunctive and infinitive outputs. Citing Quirk (2003) Babalola (2014) affirmed that intonation is how the level of voice changes to add meaning to the communication. The study recommended that the teaching of and the application of tone must be given adequate attention to promoting global mutual understanding and transparency in the communication processes among individuals.

Zulfugaroua (2018) examined the function of intonation in the English language, pointing out that without intonation that it is impossible to understand the expression and the thoughts that the speaker used in expressing his or her words that are communicated from the sender to the receiver. Adding that the stress, rhythm, connected speech and accent affect the intonation and manner in which the communication effects takes place between two or more individuals. Furthermore, the attitudinal, grammatical, focusing, discourse

and psychological functions of the speaker helps in their interpersonal communication exchange. The study recommended that mastering intonation in communication will go a long way in fostering the relationship between two individuals thereby leading to healing.

Asadu, et al (2019) analyzed the intonation patterns of selected Nigerian bilingual educated speakers of English using Pierrehumbert's Auto-Segmental Metrical approach to intonation. The study revealed that there was a low level of proficiency in the use and assignment of accurate patten as such the use of low pitch accent, and low boundary tone in the speeches of the individuals thereby affects the communication as it should be rising to non-effective communication, thereby creating tension. The study recommended that individuals should develop and increase their use of meaningful utterance in the use of words or sentences during their interpersonal exchange and not have issues of misinterpretations and less understanding.

Therapoetics Discourse

Ha, et al (2010) examined doctor-patient communication as a means to build on therapoetics in the doctor-patient relationship as the act and heart of medical practices. The study was a pointing out that the doctor's communication and interpersonal skill encompasses the ability to gather information to facilitate accurate diagnosis, counselling appropriately with the use of therapoetics instrument and establishing a caring relationship with patients. The study revealed that effective interpersonal exchange between doctor-patient has the potential for healing as it regulates emotional disorder, facilitating comprehensive medical information, with a better understanding between the doctor and the patients and by extension both the doctor and the patient's expectations as well. Furthermore, it was indicated that effective interpersonal exchange enhances control ability to tolerate each other, speedily recover from illness and increase daily function thereby reducing stress and enhancing their psychological adjustment, thereby improving their mental health. It was recommended that effective interpersonal exchange should be encouraged by both doctor-patient/patients relatives to enhance healing and mental habits.

Khan and Khan (2014) examined verbal abuse in schools and its devastating impact on child psychology. The study was aimed at examining the devastating impacts as children spend almost their early lives in schools and by extension on society as an adult. The study revealed that emotional abuse existed in schools and was perpetrated by teachers. The mode of the abuse was through offensive language such as threats, shouting, yelling and screaming, critical comments with harsh ones and passing nasty remarks. Findings indicated that although violence against children is entrenched in society, prior attention has not been given to handling issues relating to child right. The individual becomes the victim of verbal abuse on a daily basis by their teachers, parents and friends thereby leading to developing heated against teachers, schools and the subjects to which the teachers teach. Furthermore, some dropped out of school as a result of being shy and inability to take more of the abuse that comes from the teachers and school environment.

The study recommended that stakeholders and concerned authorities should be informed about the devastating symptoms of verbal abuse on child psychology and should improve their surveillance as crucial situations are prevailing in the schools and communities as well. Furthermore, teachers should be re-educated on their duties, stop all forms of abuse from them, and colleagues and implement strategies that will enhance and help to access teacher competence, job satisfaction and stress. Additionally that the media and civil societies should play their roles in highlighting the dangers that come with such an impact on society in the near future.

DuBose, et al (2016) observed that healing is a factor of emotional and psychological acceptance, which is based on the results of the social, behavioural and functionality of acceptable change that aid healing through the access to view other person's perception and nature, light, noise control, barriers to the free environment and room layout. Adding that healing space evokes a sense of configuration of mind, body and spirit towards a positive full healing of the soul. Similarly, Gushee (2018) noted that time and space nurture the mind, body and spirits to enjoy peace, rest and vitality resulting in positive change, finding meaning and movement towards healing realisation of the body positively and shorter post-operation hospital stay, fewer negative evaluation comments from nurses, took fewer moderate to strong analgesic doses and had a slightly lower score for minor post-surgical complication. Noting that time and space are contributory factors that aid healing processes which are based on the relationship between healthcare givers and their patients which can also be either a violation of personal or time-space through oral or written communication. Closing the gap between time and space through the avoidance of issues that are language-based barriers through the interchange of thought, opinions or information that leads to healing processes. These can be achieved basically with psychotherapy, counselling, medical counselling and healthcare. Lack of interpersonal exchange between individuals at various levels affected by health communication is more common among people who lack strong interpersonal communication and most times lead to a silent death.

Theoretical framework

The study is hinged on the Affection Exchange theory. Affection Exchange theory was propounded by Fory Floyd in 2001. Floyd's postulations believed that affection communication fosters long-term survival between individuals and by extension the well-being of society. Littlejohn, et al (2017) noted that Floyd in his theory stated that affection exchange affects persons in three different dimensions. First is the dimension of the nonverbal message which includes touching, smiling and vocalic expressions (pitch, volume, rate and tone of the voice). The second dimension has to do with the verbal expression through telling or the expression of love or affection towards an individual and the third dimension has to do with the support and the things we do for others to let them know that we care about them. Furthermore, the theory believed that exchanging affection has a physical reward as it increases and improves access to material, emotional and reproductive opportunities as not receiving affection also has a physical aversive thus the absence of

affection hurts the connection between individuals and reduced healthy living of the individual.

Floyd and Custer (2020) affirmed that the theory has to do with the contributions to health and wellness for both the sender and the receivers of the message. Adding that, the way and manners in which communication takes place have a healing therapy between individuals. Horan and Booth-Butterfield (2010) noted that the feeling of warmth and fondness that flow from person to person either verbal or nonverbal fosters long-term survival through reproduction increasing affection that will create room for adapting respect for human viability and fertility thereby impacting healthy living and healing.

Methodology

The qualitative research method was adopted using field observation covering from April to July 2024 and case studies. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) affirmed that case studies give an explanation of a given phenomenon and understanding as they focus on a particular situation. Wimmer and Dominick (2011, p.125) noted that field observation often makes an excellent pilot study because it identifies important variables and provides useful preliminary information as the study takes place in natural settings. Wali (2019) also pointed out that using the observation research method gives first-hand information on the events as the information is situation-based behaviours and in a natural setting. Wali (2019) noted that the case studies have an in-depth because of the phenomenon in a given society such as the family, school, church, community or association.

The field observation was carried out at the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni. It is believed that the data drawn from this will help the researcher to make generalizations concerning the population or the elements of consideration. The use of field observation research design in this study is vital because the design is used to investigate the interpersonal exchange and the therapoetics discourse as it regards healing through the use of words.

Presentation and discussion of findings

Communication at all levels helps to build new and improve habits with a better goal, developing relationships, revealing information and feelings from one to another, thereby redefining changes throughout our lives through interactions among others using language, tones and moods that will create an effective climate for the overall feeling or emotional mood of the individual. **This answers objective one: (determine the types of spoken words that help in the healing process).** The findings are similar to that of Ha, et al (2010) examination on doctor-patient communication as a means to build on therapoetics in the doctor-patient relationship as the act and heart of medical practices. Based on the fact that doctor's communication and interpersonal skill encompass the ability to gather information to facilitate accurate diagnosis, counselling appropriately having a good sense of words and establishing a caring relationship

with patients as effective interpersonal exchange enhance control ability to tolerate each other, speedily recovery from illness and increase daily function thereby reduced stress and enhance their psychological adjustment. It, therefore, recommended that effective interpersonal exchange should be encouraged by all to enhance healing and mental habits.

To answer objective two: (examine how the tone and mood of the speaker help in assuaging ailments).

The study found that the tone and the mood of the speaker go a long way in aiding the healing process as indicated in the founding of Khan and Khan's (2014) examination of verbal abuse in schools and its devastating impact on child psychology. Their study revealed that emotional abuse existed in schools and was perpetrated by teachers. The mode of the abuse was through offensive language such as threats, shouting, yelling and screaming, critical comments with harsh ones and passing nasty remarks. Their findings indicated that although violence against children is entrenched in society, prior attention has not been given to handling issues relating to child right. This individual becomes parents who are the victim of verbal abuse on a daily basis by their teachers, in turn, transfer these attitudes to their children thereby leading to developing heated against teachers, schools and other members of the society. As individual increased daily so the intonation and mood change affects the speaker. Stakeholders and concerned authorities must look at the devastating symptoms of verbal abuse, and the media and civil societies should play their roles in highlighting the dangers that come with such an impact on the society in the near future. Individuals must develop and increase their use of meaningful utterances in the use of words or sentences during their interpersonal exchange and not have issues of misinterpretations and less understanding (Asadu, et al, 2019).

To answer objective three: (find out how space and time in spoken communication contribute to the healing process). This is in line with the findings of Gushee (2018) who believe that time and space care for the mind, body and spirits to enjoy peace, rest and vitality resulting in positive change. He also holds that time and space can find meaning and movement towards healing that is realised through the post-operation hospital stay, fewer negative evaluation comments from nurses, look fewer moderate-to-story analgesic doses and slightly lower scores for minor post-surgical complications. Noting that time and space are contributory factors that aid healing processes between healthcare givers and their patients' violation of personal or time-space through oral or written communication. Also, Myss (2014) noted that people going about with wounds of various kinds as such, a word can kill without a gun and can make alive, observing that healing is a social phenomenon which can be either physical or emotional with a manipulative value from both the doctor and nurses.

To answer objective three: (ascertain the influence of words in the healing processes of individuals) this align with Trinya's (2019) position that most times that inclusion, control and affection are based on the

influence of words based on the response giving in communication discuss that could trigger healing or palliation that comes from the communication that is emotional and can influence the individuals. Also, Numbere (2011) aver that words are divine and that they have an impact and effects both the sender and the receiver as words bounce back to the speaker. Noting that when parents made pronouncement it influences the people later life or immediately which can be affected negatively not just the receiver only but the society in general. Noting that words are life and they have all the characteristics of living things.

CONCLUSION

The study confirmed that communication at all levels helps to build new and improve habits with a better goal, developing relationships, revealing information and feelings to one another, thereby redefining changes throughout our lives through interactions among others using language that creates an effective climate for the overall feeling or emotional mood of the individual leading to healing. Furthermore, that personal identity increases personal and health productive opportunities thereby creating room for tolerance. Therapoetics creates a connection between individuals that will help improve access to material and emotional resources that will lead to mental survival. Theoretically, the study juxtaposed the position of the Affection Exchange theory which believes that healing comes from the affection communication that comes from two or more individuals who know either themselves or of the subject matter thereby fostering long-term survival between these individuals and by extension the well-being of the society.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommended that there is a need for medical workers should have a conscious way of talking to others either patients or caregivers members of staff, and also individuals to consciously improve on their affective therapy for cordial relationships between doctor-patients/caregivers to foster speedily healing processes which can be of the mind, body and spirit.

REFERENCE

- Asadu, E. U., Okoro, F. A. & Kadiri, G. C. (2019). Analysis of Intonation Patterns of Selected Nigerian Bilingual Educated Speakers of English. *English Language Teaching*, 12(6), 45–54
- Asak, M. O. & Ohiagu, O. P. (2013). *Digital communication, new media theories and ethics*. Uche's Business Services.
- Asemah, E. S., Nwammuo, A. N. & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. A. (2017). *Theories and models of communication. Revised Ed.* Jos University Press.
- Asemah, E. S., Kente, J. S. & Nkwam-Uwaoma, A. O. A (2021). *Handbook on African communication system*. Matkol Press
- DuBose, J., MacAllister, L, & Sakallaris, B. C. (2018). Exploring the concept of healing space. *Health Environments Research & Design Journal*, 11(1), 43–56
- Floyd, K. & Custer, B. E. (2020) Affection exchange theory. Oxfordre.com. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/978019022861.013.937>
- Gushee, S. R. (2018). What is a healing space? www.ruanliving.com/blog/what-is-a-healing-space. retrieved

[4/4/2023](#)

- Horan, S. M. & Booth-Butterfield, M. (2010). Investing in affection: An investigation of affective exchange theory and relational qualities. *Communicative Quarterly* 58(4), 394–413
- Ilhan, E. G. C. & Erbas, A. K. (2016). Discourse analysis of interpersonal meaning to understanding the discrepancy between teacher knowledge and practice. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education*, 12(8), 2237–2251.
- Ken-Maduako, I. (2022). Meaning and the linguist. 39 Inaugural Lecture Series of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Pearl Publisher
- Khan, P. & Khan, W. (2014). Verbal abuse in schools and its devastating impact on child psychology. *PUTAJ Humanities and Social Sciences*, 21(1), 109–114
- Littlejohn, S. W., Foss, K. A., & Oetzel, J. G. (2017). *Theories of human communication* (11e.) Waveland Press
- Myss C. (2014). *Why people don't heal and how they can*. Three Rivers Press
- Ndolo, I. S. (2006). *Mass communication system and society*. RhyceKerex Publishers
- Numbere, G. D. (2011). *Word killeth word maketh alive*. Osia Digital Press
- Trinya, K. (2019). *Therapoetics perspectives on affective art*. 19 Inaugural Lecture Series of Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Pearl Publisher
- Van DEN BAN, A. W. (2008). Interpersonal communication and the diffusion of innovation. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 10(3), 199–220.
- Wali, G. I. (2019). *Educational research: A functional approach (Rv ed.)* Harey Publication Company.
- Wimmer, R. D. & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction. 9th edition*. CPI, Antony Rowe.
- Wood, J. T. (2006). *Communication in our lives. Fourth edition*. Thomson Wadsworth.

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF PAIN IN BESSIE HEAD'S *MARU*: A PSYCHO-POSTCOLONIAL AND AFRICAN FEMINIST READING

BY

Peace IbalaAmala

Department of English and Literary Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Email:amalapeace@yahoo.com

Felicia Ukachi Eze-Dike (PhD)

Department of English and Literary Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Email:fellydyke@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the cartography of pain in Bessie Head's novella, *Maru*. Through the lens of psychological criticism, post-colonial trauma theory and African feminist literary criticism; the paper investigates the issues of racialized otherness, gendered silencing and colonial legacies of dehumanization. Employing these theoretical frameworks, the paper projects the complex emotional and social pains eroded in the novella while arguing for literature's therapeutic power to effect healing and self-discovery. Finally, the paper reveals that *Maru* is a literary work that does not only disclose pain but also of challenging social constructs, reclaiming silenced identities and affirming healing as a blueprint for recovery.

Keywords: African Feminism, Bessie Head, Healing, Postcolonial theory, Psychology

INTRODUCTION

The intersection of literature and psychology offers profound insights into the human condition, especially in the exploration of trauma, fractured identity, and the complicated process of healing. In African literature, these concerns are particularly urgent given the continent's histories of colonial violence, racialized oppression, and enduring social inequalities. Within this context, Bessie Head's *Maru* stands out as a luminous work that maps the psychological and social landscape of suffering, what may be described as a cartography of pain while simultaneously illuminating the restorative potential of narrative reconstruction.

The novel is set in the fictional village of Dilepe, and follows Margaret Cadmore, a young Masarwa woman who must confront racial prejudice, cultural alienation, and internalized inferiority (Head 15). Through Margaret's struggle to exist within a hostile social order, Head dramatizes how systemic oppression leaves deep psychological wounds that shape subjectivity, social belonging, and self-representation. Yet, even as the novel exposes the violence of exclusion, it foregrounds the role of narrative, both self-narration and communal storytelling as a site of resistance, agency, and psychic recovery.

The concept of narrative healing is central to this study. Narrative approaches within trauma theory suggest that story-making enables individuals and communities to reconfigure memories of pain and construct alternative identities rooted in dignity rather than victimhood. *Maru* exemplifies this process through a

literary structure that unravels prejudice while simultaneously reconstructing meaning. Shigwedha observes that Head “interrogates the psychological consequences of ethnocentric segregation on marginalized bodies” while opening pathways for narrative reclamation (Shigwedha 12). Diallo similarly argues that Head's work “foregrounds psychic fractures produced by colonial violence and suggests storytelling as a space for reconstruction” (Diallo 35). Recent scholarship reinforces this reading: Agbo maintains that Head's characters embody “the trauma of exile and psychological fragmentation engendered by Southern African politics” (Agbo 48), while Kyungun shows that *Maru* portrays mental distress not as inherent pathology but as a logical response to structural injustice (Kyungun 57). Chimezie further identifies Head's fiction as a “literary clinic” where characters negotiate trauma, voice, and healing (Chimezie 145).

Head's own biography intensifies the depth of these thematic concerns. She was born of a prohibited interracial relationship under apartheid, raised in an institution, and eventually exiled to Botswana, Head lived a life marked by displacement, psychic struggle, and the pursuit of belonging. As Eilersen writes, “Head's life was an unending negotiation with identity, sanity, and survival,” a reality that profoundly informs her fictional work (Eilersen 23). This biographical context lends *Maru* a rare authenticity as a text that does not merely represent trauma but emerges from within it.

The present study precedes from the recognition that *Maru* although, has been examined from sociopolitical and feminist perspectives, its psychological dimensions especially its representation of trauma, internalized oppression, and narrative recovery remain understudied. The research therefore undertakes a critical reading of *Maru* through the theoretical frameworks of psychological criticism, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism. To ground this analysis, the study adopts three interrelated strands that illuminate the therapeutic dimensions of Head's narrative. First, it draws on narrative psychological criticism, particularly the trauma-focused scholarship of Judith Herman, Dori Laub, and Cathy Caruth, who emphasize how storytelling facilitates the reconstruction of damaged subjectivity and enables trauma survivors to reclaim their voices. Second, it applies postcolonial trauma theory, advanced by scholars such as Graham Huggan, Stef Craps, and Achille Mbembe, which interprets colonial trauma as collective, historical, and culturally transmitted, necessitating healing through communal memory and narrative re-articulation. Third, it engages African feminist literary criticism, particularly Obioma Nnaemeka's nego-feminism and Molar Ogundipe-Leslie's Stiwanism, which foreground negotiation, community survival, and gendered self-recovery as strategies through which African women reclaim agency within oppressive systems. These strands provide the analytic lens through which *Maru* is examined as a therapeutic text that transforms pain into narrative resilience and self-reclamation.

By adopting these strands of knowledge, the study explores how the novel constructs a cartography of pain, mapping the multidimensional suffering imposed by racism and cultural alienation, while simultaneously illuminating narrative as a medium of healing and self-reclamation. The aim is to situate *Maru* as a therapeutic text that demonstrates how African literature participates in psychological reconstruction by confronting trauma, reclaiming identity, and restoring agency. It argues that Head does more than critique social injustice; she offers a model of narrative transformation through which wounded identities can be healed, thereby contributing to broader global conversations on mental health, narrative resilience, and the ethics of remembering.

The study adopts a conceptual analyses rooted in qualitative method of research. It is content-based and relies on close textual examination of *Maru* through the application of psychological criticism, postcolonial

trauma theory, and African feminist literary theory. These frameworks are employed not only to interpret the psychological and ideological structures within the text but also to illuminate how narrative becomes a therapeutic medium for identity reconstruction and cultural healing. Thus, the analysis is interpretive rather than empirical, drawing meaning from textual representation, character psychology, and thematic patterns in order to theorize the novel as a literary site of trauma and recovery.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Many scholarships on *Maru* continue to foreground its psychological, cultural, and postcolonial significance, particularly concerning trauma, marginality, and identity reconstruction. Kyungun argues that the novel stages “madness” not as an illness but as a symbolic response to entrenched racial violence, positioning Margaret's psychological strain as a form of involuntary testimony against exclusionary structures (Kyungun 54). This perspective situates *Maru* within the framework of narrative psychological criticism, emphasizing how storytelling enables the reconstruction of subjectivity and transforms psychic injury into narrative agency (Herman 23; Caruth 4).

Similarly, Chimezie observes that *Maru* dramatizes the mental burdens of social ostracism, showing how psychological pain becomes both an individual affliction and a collective wound inherited through historical oppression (Chimezie 139). By narrating trauma and tracing its social origins, Head's work assumes a reparative function, consistent with postcolonial trauma theory, which interprets colonial and racialized violence as historically transmitted wounds requiring narrative re-articulation for communal and personal healing (Craps 12; Huggan 29).

Ncube situates *Maru* among texts that “mediate internalized oppression and psychic alienation” by transforming wounds into narrative agency (Ncube 90). Chigudu extends this discussion through the concept of “narrative healing,” suggesting that African literary texts operate as spaces where trauma is witnessed, retold, and re-imagined in life-affirming ways (Chigudu 53). This aligns with the psychological criticism strand, which emphasizes story-making as a mechanism for emotional and cognitive reconstruction (Laub 78).

Feminist readings enrich this psychological and postcolonial lens by demonstrating how race and gender intersect to structure marginalization. Nnaemeka's principle of nego-feminism which is grounded in negotiation and relational survival clarifies Margaret's quiet resilience as a refusal of erasure that avoids violent confrontation while asserting subjectivity (Nnaemeka 380). Ogundipe-Leslie similarly argues that African women's fiction transforms private pain into public discourse, exposing gendered suffering and demanding social responsibility (Ogundipe-Leslie 203). These insights situate *Maru* within African feminist literary criticism, highlighting how narrative enables gendered self-recovery and collective healing.

Recent scholarship also adopts postcolonial psychoanalytic perspectives to examine the “colonial wound” in *Maru*. Odhiambo, Ogembo, and Magak contend that Head's characters embody the “in-between subject,” negotiating belonging within rigid racial boundaries while generating a Third Space of hybrid identity that destabilizes fixed notions of difference (Odhiambo, Ogembo, and Magak 45). This further underscores the utility of postcolonial trauma theory, which frames the novel as a literary site for reflecting on and reconstructing historically imposed psychic injuries.

Emerging empirical studies reinforce these theoretical positions. Mhlongo and Dlamini show that collective storytelling initiatives in Southern Africa produce measurable psychological benefits, supporting the view that narrative functions as a communal healing technology (Mhlongo and Dlamini 27). Ekechi's work with Nigerian youth affected by ethnic violence demonstrates that reading and discussing fiction allows participants to articulate buried emotions, recognize shared suffering, and imagine alternative futures (Ekechi 41). Adebayo and Yusuf similarly show that patients in group therapy identify with fictional characters, gaining insight into their own trauma and regaining agency (Adebayo and Yusuf 19). These findings provide empirical support for the argument that *Maru*, and literature more broadly, serves as a psychotherapeutic instrument for psychological reconstruction and social resilience.

These studies position *Maru* as a profoundly therapeutic text that maps the psychic consequences of ethnocentric prejudice and cultural alienation while charting narrative pathways toward individual, communal, and cultural restoration. With the integration of psychological criticism, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism, scholarship now recognizes *Maru* as a work that transforms suffering into narrative resilience, reconstructs fractured identities, and affirms the enduring therapeutic capacities of African literature.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on an interdisciplinary framework that integrates psychological criticism, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism. Together, these approaches illuminate how literature functions as both an aesthetic and therapeutic medium, allowing for the exploration of trauma, the negotiation of identity, and the articulation of silenced voices in postcolonial African contexts.

Psychological Criticism

Psychological criticism emphasizes the role of literature in representing the human psyche, especially the ways narratives reflect, shape, and potentially heal inner conflict. Within this strand, narrative psychology contends that human beings understand themselves through stories, and traumatic experiences disrupt coherent self-narratives, necessitating re-narration for restoration of agency and psychological continuity (Crossley 27; Murray and Sools 3). In African literature, texts like *Maru* serve as spaces where characters articulate suppressed traumas and reconstruct fractured identities, exemplifying what Chigudu (2021) terms "narrative healing" (Chigudu 42). Through Margaret Cadmore's story, Head demonstrates how storytelling can become a therapeutic mechanism, enabling both the character and the reader to witness trauma, comprehend its social roots, and envision pathways toward psychological recovery.

Postcolonial Trauma Theory

Postcolonial trauma theory foregrounds the enduring psychic and collective wounds produced by colonial histories, systemic oppression, and cultural dislocation. Unlike Western trauma frameworks that often prioritize individual pathology, postcolonial approaches situate trauma within historical and social structures of domination. In *Maru*, trauma is not only personal but socially mediated through racial hierarchies, cultural alienation, and the internalization of prejudice. Caruth (1996) emphasizes that trauma is often unassimilated experience, only accessible through narrative, while Njogu (2022) underscores literature's role in revisiting historical trauma beyond clinical discourse, allowing symbolic confrontation and empathetic witnessing (Caruth 4; Njogu 67). Ncube (2023) further notes that Southern African

literature, including Head's work, represents “internalized oppression and psychic alienation,” thereby revealing how colonial and ethnocentric legacies shape individual subjectivity (Ncube 118). Through this lens, *Maru* is interpreted as a literary site where marginalized voices are recovered, histories renegotiated, and social injustices psychologically addressed.

African Feminist Literary Criticism

African feminist literary criticism offers an essential perspective for understanding how gender intersects with trauma, cultural marginalization, and narrative reconstruction. Unlike Universalist feminist approaches, African feminist criticism is rooted in local histories, cultural specificities, and the lived experiences of African women. Scholars such as Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie and Nnaemeka emphasize the centrality of negotiation, resilience, and subtle resistance in women's narratives (Ogundipe-Leslie 12; Nnaemeka 376). Applied to *Maru*, this lens highlights Margaret Cadmore's position as both a woman and a member of an ethnically marginalized group, demonstrating how her quiet assertion of dignity constitutes a culturally situated and psychological act of self-reclamation. Diallo (2022) reinforces this perspective by showing how Head's narrative reconstructs subjectivity amid intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and social exclusion (Diallo 203).

With the integration of these strands, the study conceptualizes *Maru* as a text that depicts “**cartography of pain**”, mapping the interlocking psychological, social, and cultural dimensions of trauma while simultaneously reveals the restorative capacities of narrative. The novel becomes both a mirror of psychic injury and an imaginative space for healing, enabling the reconstruction of fractured identities, the reclamation of silenced voices, and the imaginative renegotiation of belonging. As Chigudu aptly observes, African literature “provides the language, metaphors, and symbolic resources needed to confront trauma and envision new modalities of being” (Chigudu 53). This framework underscores the study's central argument in contexts of historical and social pain, literature functions as a therapeutic medium, enabling both individual and collective processes of healing and resilience.

THE CARTOGRAPHY OF PAIN IN BESSIE HEAD'S *MARU*

Bessie Head's *Maru* presents a nuanced mapping of psychological and social wounds which depicts a cartography of pain that traces the intersecting terrains of racial trauma, gendered silencing, and the search for selfhood. The novel operates not merely as a story but as a therapeutic canvas upon which the legacies of colonial and patriarchal histories are rendered visible and, potentially, transformed through narrative. Through the integrated lenses of narrative psychology, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism, this analysis demonstrates how Head exposes the scars of oppression while simultaneously gesturing toward resilience and psychological reconstruction.

At the center of this pain lies the systemic dehumanization of the Masarwa people. Early in the text, they are described as “an oddity of the human race, who are half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey” (Head 6), a grotesque image that both alienates and objectifies. Postcolonial trauma theory highlights that colonial discourse fractures subjectivity, producing psychological injury that endures long after the formal structures of domination have receded (Fanon 93; Bhabha 112). Within *Maru*, these impositions of inferiority are internalized, shaping Margaret Cadmore's early sense of self and embedding profound social and psychic vulnerability. Head's depiction demonstrates how trauma is not simply an individual experience but one embedded in historical and structural oppression, aligning with Njogu's argument that postcolonial

literature provides symbolic spaces to witness, renegotiate, and integrate suppressed histories (Njogu 67).

From a narrative psychological perspective, Margaret's journey illustrates how stories, both imposed and self-authored shape identity and foster healing. Initially, her life is framed by the white benefactor who names and educates her, a narrative of "rescue" layered with benevolent racism. As the novel progresses, however, Margaret begins to reclaim her own story, an act central to narrative psychology, which asserts that trauma recovery often occurs through the reconfiguration of personal narratives from victimhood to agency (McAdams 96; Chigudu 42). This reclamation is subtly dramatized when she encounters the truth driver's gentle encouragement: "Come, we'll go... you must not be afraid of the world" (Head 15). Such narrative interventions act as small, transformative moments that interrupt internalized fear, enabling Margaret to reconstruct her sense of self and establish trust in relational contexts.

African feminist literary criticism further illuminates the intersectional dimensions of Margaret's pain and recovery. The compounded oppressions she endures as a Masarwa woman navigating ethnic hierarchies and patriarchal structures are exemplified in her cautious disclosure to Dikeledi: "I am a Masarwa... don't mention this to anyone else" (Head 16). As Ogundipe-Leslie notes, African women's experiences of trauma are shaped by complex stratifications that require negotiation and careful engagement with power (Ogundipe-Leslie 14). Similarly, Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism frames Margaret's cautious yet assertive narrative as a strategic and culturally situated resistance. She neither fully accepts nor entirely ruptures oppressive structures, embodying a subtle reclamation of agency and dignity ("Nego-Feminism" 368). Through these acts of storytelling and relational navigation, Margaret's narrative becomes therapeutic, aligning with Nnaemeka's notion of "narrative healing," in which articulating trauma is simultaneously an act of self-reclamation and communal acknowledgment ("Narrative Healing" 381).

Healing in *Maru* is also relational. As Margaret forms meaningful connections, her psychological wounds begin to soften. The novel observes, "The loneliness had disappeared like the mist before warmth of a rising sun" (Head 22), a metaphor that illustrates the restorative potential of human connection in rebuilding fractured identity. From a psychological criticism standpoint, these relational narratives facilitate integration of fragmented selfhood, fostering agency and resilience (McAdams 96). Simultaneously, postcolonial and feminist perspectives contextualize these interactions within structural and cultural constraints, showing how recovery occurs both individually and communally, in dialogue with social realities that continue to bear traces of historical trauma and gendered marginalization (Chigudu 53; Diallo 203).

By integrating these strands, *Maru* emerges as a therapeutic literary space, one that charts the multiple dimensions of suffering while simultaneously illuminating pathways for psychic reconstruction. Head's novel demonstrates that literature can function as both a witness to historical and social trauma and a medium through which fractured identities are renegotiated, voices once silenced are articulated, and collective resilience is imagined. In this sense, the novel not only maps pain but actively envisions healing, situating storytelling as a vital instrument in the reconstruction of self and community.

Bessie Head's depiction of the marriage between Margaret and *Maru* functions as a pivotal element within the novel's cartography of pain, carrying profound psychological, social, and cultural implications. As a union between a Masarwa woman and a member of Tswana royalty, it challenges entrenched structures that have historically marginalized Margaret's people, confronting both ethnic prejudice and gendered

hierarchies. *Maru's* decision to marry Margaret performs what Quayson describes as an ethically charged act, one that symbolically reconfigures social meanings around historical suffering and collective trauma (112).

Viewed through narrative psychology, this marriage operates as a space of therapeutic potential. Margaret's acceptance and recognition within the marital relationship facilitate the re-authoring of her internal narrative, enabling her to move from a state of shame and internalized inferiority toward agency and psychological integration (McAdams 96; Chigudu 42). In this sense, the marriage functions as a narrative intervention, where relational dynamics provide moments of emotional repair and the reconstruction of selfhood.

From the perspective of African feminist literary criticism, the marriage exemplifies the nuanced ways African women negotiate liberation within existing social structures. Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism illuminates Margaret's position: her engagement with *Maru's* love does not overthrow patriarchy or ethnic hierarchies entirely but creates a relational space in which her personhood is recognized and her voice validated ("Nego-Feminism" 368). This strategic negotiation reflects what Ogun-dipe-Leslie identifies as the "complex stratifications" of African womanhood, where resilience and healing emerge through culturally situated, often subtle, interventions rather than overt confrontation (14).

The act of marriage also intersects with postcolonial trauma theory, as it addresses structural and historical sources of marginalization while fostering psychological repair. The union acknowledges the scars inflicted by colonial and ethnic hierarchies, allowing Margaret's identity to be repositioned within a social space that has previously denied her belonging. By centering recognition, affirmation, and relational validation, the marriage demonstrates how intimate and symbolic acts can contribute to individual and communal healing, even within societies shaped by historical oppression (Fanon 93; Njogu 67).

In these intertwined frameworks, the marriage emerges not merely as a social or romantic event but as a therapeutic moment, contributing to the novel's broader cartography of pain and healing. Margaret's relational integration through *Maru* allows her to reconstruct her personal narrative, negotiate the legacy of structural injustice, and participate in the creation of new social and ethical imaginaries. The novel thus models a form of healing that is both individual and communal, suggesting that acts of recognition, love, and storytelling operate as tools for psychological and cultural restoration.

Ultimately, *Maru* positions pain and recovery as mutually constitutive. The novel maps suffering while simultaneously charting pathways toward resilience, narrative agency, and relational affirmation. The marriage between Margaret and Maru exemplifies this dynamic, illustrating how intimate relationships can function as instruments of healing, self-reclamation, and ethical reconfiguration. Through the integrated lens of narrative psychology, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism, Head's work affirms that storytelling, human connection, and culturally grounded negotiation are central to navigating historical and social trauma, enabling the transformation of pain into both personal and collective renewal (Chigudu 53; Diallo 203).

CONCLUSION

This study has examined *Maru* as a complex psychosocial and postcolonial narrative in which pain becomes a structural force shaping both individual consciousness and communal relations. By integrating strands of

psychological criticism, postcolonial trauma theory, narrative psychology, and African feminist literary criticism, the analysis demonstrates that Head's narrative does not only document trauma but also stages the possibility of psychic, relational, and communal healing. Margaret's journeys from stigmatization to emotional visibility, and *Maru's* ethically disruptive marriage proposal, reposition the Masarwa body from a site of historical erasure to one of re-narrated dignity. Pain in the text is therefore not static; it is negotiated in spaces of love, storytelling, and ethical recognition, revealing how narrative itself functions as a therapeutic practice.

Through this interpretive lens, *Maru* emerges as cartography of reclamation mapping how the colonially wounded subject may come to speak, to belong, and to reframe memory. The fusion of feminist negotiation ethics (Nnaemeka), trauma witnessing (Caruth, Felman), and indigenous psycho-literary insight positions the novel as a literary site of recovery where the marginalized find voice, not by escaping oppressive structures, but by rewriting their meanings from within. Ultimately, the study affirms that Head's fiction is not merely a record of historical injustice but a transformative text that proposes narrative, empathy, and interracial love as instruments for psychological and social restoration.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study introduces a composite theoretical framework merging narrative psychology, postcolonial trauma theory, and African feminist literary criticism to demonstrate how *Maru* operates simultaneously as a trauma narrative and a therapeutic text. It also advances the notion of “literary cartography of pain” to describe how Head spatializes historical trauma in bodies, relationships, and communal memory, thereby expanding existing trauma criticism in African literature. Additionally, repositions Margaret's marriage to Maru as a therapeutic and ethically charged act, showing how nego-feminism and narrative reconstruction create shared spaces of healing an interpretive move underdeveloped in earlier scholarship focused mainly on race and power. And finally expands African trauma studies beyond violence and colonial brutality, showing how literature becomes a modality of psychosocial recovery, identity remapping, and communal reconciliation, thereby contributing original insight to emerging African literary psychotherapy discourses.

WORKS CITED

- Adebayo, Tunde, and Ibrahim Yusuf. “Literature, Memory, and Group Psychotherapy in Contemporary Africa.” *African Journal of Mental Health Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2020, pp. 77–95.
- Agbo, Joshua. *Bessie Head and the Trauma of Exile: Identity and Alienation in Southern African Fiction*. Routledge, 2021.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Chigudu, Faith. “Narrative Healing and Literary Memory in Contemporary African Fiction.” *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2021, pp. 45–62.
- Chimezie, Oge. “Trauma and the Healing Self in Bessie Head's Fiction.” *Interdisciplinary Journal of African and Asian Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2020, pp. 135–150.
- Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Diallo, Mariam. “Gender, Pain, and Selfhood in Bessie Head's *Maru*.” *Journal of African Literary Studies*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2022, pp. 30–45.
- Eilersen, Gillian Stead. *Bessie Head: Thunder Behind Her Ears*. James Currey, 1995.
- Ekechi, Chukwuma. “African Fiction and the Psychosocial Reconstruction of Youth: Evidence from Nigeria.” *African Journal of Trauma Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2021, pp. 40–55.

- Head, Bessie. *Maru*. Heinemann African Writers Series, 1971.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Huggan, Graham. *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins*. Routledge, 2001.
- Kyungun, Frank. "Psychoanalysis and Madness in Bessie Head's *Maru*." *IBBUL Academic Review*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2022, pp. 50–68.
- Laub, Dori, and Shoshana Felman. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. Routledge, 1992.
- Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony*. University of California Press, 2001.
- Mhlongo, Ntokozo, and S'phehile Dlamini. "Community Storytelling as Trauma Intervention in KwaZulu-Natal." *South African Review of Psychology and Culture*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2022, pp. 22–41.
- Ncube, Linda. "Internalized Oppression and Psychic Alienation in Southern African Women's Writing." *Journal of Postcolonial Inquiry*, vol. 11, no. 3, 2023, pp. 70–92.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. "Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2004, pp. 357–385.
- Njoroge, Mercy, and Peter Kareithi. "Bibliotherapy in Refugee Settlements in East Africa: Literature as Emotional Medicine." *Journal of Migration and Mental Health*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2021, pp. 13–29.
- Odhiambo, Philip, Beatrice Ogembo, and Kenneth Magak. "Negotiating Hybrid Subjectivities in Southern African Fiction." *Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2021, pp. 40–60.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. *Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Africa World Press, 1994.
- Shigwedha, Vitus. "Ethnocentric Segregation and Identity in Bessie Head's Works." *Southern African Literary Review*, vol. 14, no. 3, 2021, pp. 1–18.

MELODIC HEALING: MUSIC AND MOVEMENT IN TRAUMATIC RECOVERY ITS POWER IN EXORCISM

BY KOMI, BARNABAS,

ASSISTANT LECTURER, DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL STUDIES
IGNATIUS AJURU UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION RUMUOLUMENI, PORT HARCOURT,
NIGERIA.

barnabaskomi@gmail.com, 08068058364.

Abstract

This paper examined the melodic healing: music and movement in traumatic healing that is rooted as a means of recovery. As noted, that music can be explained as an organized noise. Although this noise needs interpretation. Its main aim was to bring message to the hearer. This hearer becomes the object that the power of music acts on. The magic is seen in the various processes that became the medium of communication and cured whatever ailment. In this context, music is subdivided into praise, jazz, blues, lullaby that is song that served as aesthetics' and sleeping pill. Generally, music has done more better than harm to the human society. This work engaged the advocacy criticism and the text immanent method using the case study of king Saul who was traumatized out of depression but was remedied through melodious songs. This research explored the theory of collective effervescence which revealed that man is dynamic and developed an influence in a social group which implied that most of man's trauma is socially deduced. Also, that a group possibly the choir can be persuaded to relieve man of his mental dilemma especially in respect to his mind's abnormality and trauma is a type of wound. It implied that when a piece of music is put together in which it creates alto, bass, treble, and others in its crescendo the best of its medicine can be produced. This work engaged the qualitative method of data analysis, with primary and secondary sources of data collected. Nevertheless, a maximum of 10-20, oral interviewees were selected as sampling technique. The work contributed to knowledge applied in afro-gospel music had given to healing of those who were mentally oppressed and recommended that both old and modern didactic music cured any ailment that was mentally traced.

Keywords: *Traumatic healing, music, mental, Exorcism, Melody.*

INTRODUCTION:

As it is made known that this work investigates melodic healing: music and movement in trauma recovery. The therapy of music is the potency of hearing it. However, studies have actualized the magic that a wound otherwise called trauma can be cured through melodious songs. In this case, this paper is an attempt to find lasting solution to the traumatized through emotional ecstasy of music and songs. However, a piece of lullaby has been known to induce sleep, rest and bring emotional recovery in a person. This means that the aesthetics influence of a melodic music if properly refined can be used as a veritable tool for traumatic recovery. Moreover, a trauma can be called an emotional calamity of a wounded mind, psyche and emotional difficulty caused by traumatic experience. In other words, music especially melodic songs are not just mere sounds they have the potency and ingredients of curing the wounded mind. In this light, it is argued

that music is more than just a liturgical enchantment: it made a sacred text viable, connecting the often obtuse and generalized words with congregants' personal needs including healing and cultural norms, (Hackett,2012). The foremost issue is the ability of this melodic music to serve as springboard to recover from trauma. In a related development, this research would bring to limelight the benefits of melodic healing from trauma and music became a form of casting out of evil spirit from king Saul .In this view, the case is that what volume of spread of music bring recovery in the environment of pain-killing and using the case study of king Saul and David in the Old Testament. In this sum, the work makes recommendations and contribution to knowledge as a neo-therapy of the vibes of melodic songs had known in the recovery of trauma.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

The word " Trauma " is generally regarded as a wound. Implies a situation that is not usual. In this sense, the original Greek word is called *τραυμα(trauma)* and it is pronounced as trauma meaning, a wound, a blow or a stroke. This expression is seen from the picture of one being beaten severally or laid blows. It is used in the sense of death or a sword in the life of a person. When someone is said to be traumatized it means he or she is wounded internally which affects the mind (William & Merrile ,2014). In this regard, it means that a trauma is an in-side -out injury that requests recovery. In recovery, it is known that it is a process of healing and curing or remedying a deplorable situation. Besides, the word " Music is simply an organized noise. A sounding together. Although it has a message that requires interpretation. Moreover, melody is also gotten from Greek word " *ψαλλο*, translated as " *Psallo* ", this means an organized noise that is played on a stringed instrument with fingers and hence sing with a harp. It also means to sing a hymn, to sing praise or making melody in a sweet tone or songs. In this case, mental is anything relating to the total emotion and intellectual response of an individual to external reality. Moreover, this relates to the mind's activity or its product as an object of study. Nevertheless, sometimes it is intended to the care or the treatment of persons affected by psychiatric disorder.

Relatively, mental illness can be recovered depending on the perspective of the healer or solution administered to it. This work investigated on how music or organized melodious sound can be practice in traumatic recovery. Similarly, Advocacy criticism is an approach of interpretation as an umbrella in a liberationist African cum American, feminist and related studies. The proponents advocate that the results be used to change today's social, political, religious situation that relate to trauma. In this maxim is the liberation, recovery of the traumatized. In addition, the process of recovery of the wounded is the only optic that the scripture could be read. This approach is defended on the ground that the biblical writers and all writings were not without their advocacy. For instance, men and other religions, psychological and political writers reflect the views of the society, with ecclesiastical viewpoints. It's added that each wound or trauma can be recovered consciously or unconsciously by the potency of music (Raymond ,2014; 28). In this addition, one would like to find out the sociological facts of the traumatized through data for recovery.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work engaged the theory of collective effervescence advocated by (Emile Durkheim,2012p). Collective effervescence is a perceived energy formed by a gathering of people in a religious crusade, sports and carnivals. This perception of collectiveness can cause people to act differently in their daily lifecycle. It

means that man can act in somewhat abnormal because of his experience in a society. Reason being that his life is faced with one trauma that is socially induced. In this sense Durkheim as a social analyst argued that emotion runs high in the growing people forcing them to act in new ways and giving them a sense of some hidden force in respect to what they hear using the sounds of any sort. The sense of external force affects the mind. Consequently, the dichotomy of the society as a result of trauma that they had experienced. Nevertheless, there is an advance music perceived energy possibly called a choir that has an organized force in a melody applying sounds on her members that give in to healing of emotional wounds known as trauma.

MUSIC AS A MEANS OF TRAUMATIC RECOVERY

As noted earlier that music is an organized noise or sound. It involves various classes of the said music. Some of these classes include Jazz, blues, praise, lullaby a song induced as aesthetics as in pains remover. Most of the African music are played on stringed instrument or using wood, and animal skins to produce melody. In fact, African believe in dancing, clapping of hands and ecstatic emotional crescendo that is highly spiritualized. This means in African societies the fact remains that man has abstracted the world around him especially the world of music and melody in a profound religious leaning and dragged music into every aspect of his daily life and experience.

In a related development, music is used as a milieu for worship, war, birthday party, marriage, burial to mention but a few. This means in all situation or occasion music is the therapy of man's mind and mental fitness. It gives healing to the weak, strength to weak, and power to the soldier. Furthermore, the emotional aspects of religious devotionism are reflected in a revival meeting, (Wotogbe,2012:59). This deduced the fact that most of the restoration of soul and spirit is carried out through melodic healing as a therapy. The experience is known through expression of the emotions of the player.

We need to realize that music, and the arts in general, are not just ornaments or illustrations of something more profoundly important to Religions engagements in their own right that we need actively to give Serious scholarly attention. (Gbule & Nwaka, 2014p).

This means that it is a form of self-realization that songs heal, cure and solace mental ailment. The potency in this psychological medicine of the human mind to set free those who are wounded. In this sense, music helps in the vibes which it provides. In this regard, a vibe is a distinctive feeling or quality capable of being sensed. In a related ideology, the connectivity is noted within the ambiance of music as quoted thus: "played the chords. He played the vibes and suddenly, I had a new song. It was cool".

In addition, it is known as the tunes of opening featured melodic statements and music transitioning seamlessly between Piano and vibes (David Picker,2025). This is closely related to enjoy music. This conveys the sense that music and song gives healing or recover a traumatic condition. It also reveals that various aspects of melodic songs give credence to sounds as in music. Furthermore, contended that deciding on a research focus can be confusing because it is bedeviled with issues; the nature of melodic songs, its generation, mediation, reception. Perception, interpretation, effect, preservation, transmission, remediation and use giving a lot of change of the mind which is the seat of reasoning (Hacket,2012). The potentiality of melodic and titillating sound can be given a graphic form as it gives consciousness of the mind which is created to receive any good for its remediation and possibly negative as it can damage the mind.

In any case, some causes of trauma as noted are abuse of individual, sexual harassment, rape, public ridicule, death of premature parents, to mention but few. This gives meaning as one is able to differentiate between good and evil. The transmission of melodic sound gives sonic analysis as a result of its healing effects.

MELODY AS AN ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY OF HEALING

In this regard, melody underscores that a sonic of knowing piece of song, away of attending to hearing. This means that the mind of hearing sound is a gate way into the heart of any man. It absorbed the sound and sends it into the soul, spirit and body. This is the same thing that medicine does to the body. It goes through the mouth and cures the flesh or the body. In this view, a way of absorbing that would do justice to the layered complexity of the human and environmental world of music. The matter hinges of the fact that when a melodic song is played the individual gets the music and use it as aesthetic that is a pain relief material and substance. For instance, the Bell when it is rung has a transcendental message that directs the mind of a man. It means that the environment of an acoustic can give sense as an ecological hallucination of enlightenment. Similarly, it is maintained that to focus on the sacred music usually pertaining to liturgy of selected religious traditions and how these generate communal esotericism. In a nutshell, the ecology of healing through songs has been found that melodic music gives room for therapeutic healing of trauma (Gbule,2012p.58).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In cause of this work there are two methods of exploring the interpretation, the first is qualitative approach. This means that an analysis of logical presentation is been administered. This is followed by the text-immanent method. In this case, a sample scriptural portion was exegeted in a particular scenario of how music was played by David in the Old Testament to King Saul who was traumatized but recovered through melodious songs.

Moreover, the cure of mental wound is closely -related to the mind or psychical injury which affect the victim. The lens of interpretation engaged the advocacy criticism which is an optic of using the sacred text as a liberationist to change today's social, emotional, political and religious situation. It advocates that the exegesis should not be used as a tool of the oppressed rather it should be used as a liberation material in giving solution to people's traumatic situation.

AN EXEGESIS ON HOW MUSIC AND MOVEMENT ACTED AS FORM OF EXORCISM TO KING SAUL IN 1 SAMUEL 16:23-24.

23. "But the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented and troubled him. Saul's servant said to him, behold, an evil spirit from God traumatized him. Let our lord now command your servants here before to a man who plays skillfully, a valiant man, a man of war, prudent in speech and eloquent, an attractive person, and the Lord is with him. 24. And when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, David took a lyre and played; so Saul was refreshed and became well-healed, recovered and the evil spirit (Trauma) left him".

In the Ancient Near East, the tradition of music culture where usually seen as part of the people's way of life. In this case, the enthronement of kings, going for battle, dedication of the Temple and others were accompanied by songs. It shows that the people see music as having therapeutic effects. Therapeutics is

relating to the treatment of disease or disorder by remedial agents for curing of diseases. It has a beneficial effect on the body or the mind. It is synonymous with curative, healing, medicinal, remedial, restorative. In this view, music especially melodic song is used in treating and attending to traumatic individuals.

Furthermore, David played a lyre instrument for King Saul. This particular music was used in soothing and calming Saul. This is when he was experiencing trauma of the mind. The scripture indicated that when David played the harp, the evil spirit would depart from him and he would feel refreshed. This is likened to psychological trauma which makes a person to be agitated, melancholic, and full of anxiety. However, David's music cleared up the sickness. David was regarded as a "sweet singer of Israel". In Psalm 16:11, thus:

" In your presence there is fullness of joy". It is noted that king Saul was traumatized with an evil spirit. A trauma is psychologically or emotionally stressful in a way that can lead to serious mental and emotional problems. This is seen as a disorder. That is an abnormal physical or mental condition. In the above exegesis the Hebrew word for trauma is חַרָּה and is pronounced as *hara-ah*. It means distressful condition.

Also, the Hebrew word for harp as in music or song is קִנּוֹר called as *hak-kin-nowr*. Meaning songs, sweet songs, melody or sounds. In this case, the word evil spirit is from the Hebrew root word, רוּחַ , pronounced as *ru-ah*, it meant genetically as spirit, breeze, air, or wind.

In a related development, trauma has been healed through the wind of sweet melodious songs. Also, that trauma is seen as a negative breeze or air that is against the sweet comfort life of any person. However, it has been cured using the case study of King Saul through the music in the Old Testament. This became real in a particular case (Mr. Appeal, Gbam, oral interview) attested that while he listened to Christian blues, his internal mind organs were immediately recovered from a trauma of his mind which was occupied with an evil spirit.

MELODIC SONGS: A HEARING CULTURE AND ITS VITALITY.

It has come to stay that melodic songs have its culture and vitality. This is because its nature is constant. In fact, the hearing culture of music in any place looms large. In this context, (Hackett, 2012p. 56) emphasized that the study of music in relation to religious ideas and practice is not essentially about music. Scholars have defined, and explained that music is a sound that is culturally organized and culturally meaningful. This definition, is owing to the fact in some concepts, what applied as music may not find the same or similar meaning in another culture. In this regard, the melodic of sounds and songs may connote different meaning from one culture to another.

The fact in this view explores the functionality of music that give rise to its practice from one people to the other. Music and melodic hearing are as old as the creation of the earth. In this vein, it added that the foregoing has shown that it is difficult to write about sound, music and sonic experiences, including silence and noise (Gbule, 2012 ;57). Yet in the face of these challenges, scholars delving into academic study of religious sound and sonic experiences have demonstrated the range of possible interrelationships between religion, music and sound.

A whole lot needs a graphic recollection of the efficacy of music in the experience of healing. Some said " It is better said than done". The experience of the individual has moved from one stage of expression to the

another. The field of knowledge has made adequate effort to rediscover the potency that is found in music especially in the area of therapeutic healing. The Centre of the matter shows every aspect of melodic sonic echo gives a more experience in the form of one healing or the other.

The issue at this point is the transcendental nature of music which moves into two-dimensional world of spirits and nature. Consequently, it is underlined that across various religions, there are some observable relationship between specific melodic recovery sounds and specific divinities and spirit beings with these interests of scholars have continued to increase calls. Indeed, environmental sounds as well as those produced by voices and instruments have produced sonic awareness and curiosity that suggest that noise-making instruments and devices are mediums that are deployed to establish contacts with the supersensible world. The effects of the contacts have produced its benefit of using melodic healing for recovery of trauma (Nwala,2012 p.60).

However, the case abounds that most of these discoveries come as a result of its therapeutic nature and influence. The stimuli go into various organs of the human system to revive and its meaning in sounds which produce the healing as hearing culture continues. In a related development, melodic healing from trauma has become culturally approved as a means of curative lens. It emphasizes that silence was positively a value and could have curative functions.

It might mark the arrival of a deity at a shrine (unheard as unseen) or be linked to funeral or initiation ceremonies because of its association with the other world of deities, spirits, and ancestors. This speaks in the case that music can be a producer and inducer. It exposes that the connections with the other world are specifically and musically attached. In fact, this shows that each atmosphere of the song becomes relevant in producing its capacity of healing especially from a traumatic condition. There are people who experience deep emotional and trancing in the arena of music. This speaks of the healing experience in the dimension of music.

This is further studied in the field of neuroscience and biology. This officially studies the sonic on particular sounds (drumming, droning, and chanting). This gives spirituality and mysticism of echoing of other places as spiritual dynamics. However, ritual of melodic healing stands as the gate way into producing the various deep emotional healing and recovery. Melodic music and meditation tend to be innate with power. In this view, the vitality of the music and melodic sounds affirms that the wounded in the mind can find lasting solution through the healing power of music. To crown it all, this work is an affirmation of the findings that religious metaphysics of the voice, even in silence or in a sacred place, are directly linked to the spiritual condition of the body and soul.

MUSIC AS A DEEP EMOTIONAL HEALING AND RECOVERY

One of the basic needs of healing is emotional recovery. In this view, the clarification of what emotion is, is important. In this vein, emotion is a complex psychological state that involves a combination of subjective experience, psychological responses, and behavioral expressions, triggered by significant events or situations. It is a way for an individual to process and react to their environment, influencing thoughts, feelings, and actions. Also, it is a strong feeling deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.

It involves sentiments, reactions, response, passion and sensation. The derivations above recalled in emotional experience. Music serves as a window to recover. Furthermore, a pathology of emotion is not simply an abnormality but would represent in itself a felt pathology, the science of the causes and effects of diseases, especially the branch of medicine that deals with the laboratory examination of samples of body tissue for diagnostic or forensic purposes. This is caused by an experience felt by a person and recognized by others.

In this sense, the emotional intelligence (EI), also known as emotional quotient (EQ), is the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges and defuse conflict according to help guide. It encompasses the capacity to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions, as well as the ability to recognize, understand, and influence the emotions of others according to medical news today.

The emotional experience involves an unusual reflection in music reflection in music encompasses a multifaceted concept, including the physical reflection of sound waves, the process of self-reflection on musical performance, and the way music reflects cultural and personal experiences. It can refer to the echoing or reverberation of sound, the act of critically examining one's musical abilities, or the way music embodies the values and history of a society. This serves in a deep emotional environment. Deep emotion refers to powerful, intense feelings that resonate deeply within a person, often significantly impacting their state of mind and actions. It's more than just surface-level feelings; it's a profound experience that can be difficult to articulate.

It is in this vein that emotional knowledge has generally been operationalized. An emotional operational definition outlines how an emotion will be measured or observed in a specific context. It translates abstract emotional concepts into concrete, observable behaviors, physiological responses, or self-reported experiences. This allows researchers and practitioners to consistently and reliably study emotions. The size of the individual's emotion vocabulary or active and appropriate of emotional worlds.

This reveals that one's feeling and sensation interprets the vibes. "Atmospheres of music" refers to the emotional and atmospheric qualities that a piece of music evokes. It's about how the music makes you feel, encompassing mood, energy, and overall atmosphere. It's a subjective experience where your emotions and physical sensations respond to the music. This synergy is demanded in the recovery of emotional trauma. Emotional trauma is a psychological response to an event or series of events that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, leaving them feeling unsafe or helpless. It can stem from various experiences, including accidents, violence, abuse, or the loss of a loved one.

The impact can be severe, leading to ongoing distress, difficulty managing emotions, and challenges in relationships. The two attracts one another to healing. Trauma healing is a process of recovering from the emotional and psychological impact of traumatic experiences. It involves various stages and approaches, including acknowledging the trauma, building a support system, practicing self-care, and potentially seeking professional help.

The goal is to restore a sense of safety, empowerment, and the ability to live in the present without being

overwhelmed by the past. In this sense, music significantly impacts relationships by fostering emotional connections. Music therapy is a form of therapy that utilizes music to address physical, emotional, cognitive, and social needs of individuals. It involves a trained professional, a music therapist, who uses music experiences like listening, playing instruments, singing, or songwriting, to help individuals achieve therapeutic goals.

These goals can range from pain and stress reduction to improving communication skills and emotional well-being. It shapes relationships in a dynamic way. It can be a powerful tool for expressing emotions and feelings. This builds intimacy, and even navigating conflict on a heart -break. Music has a powerful capacity to heal, influencing both emotional and physical well-being.

It can reduce stress, lower heart rate and blood pressure, and even improve cardiovascular health by affecting the body's nervous system and release of hormones like serotonin and dopamine, which contribute to positive emotions. Music can also be used to manage pain and improve the quality of lifecycle for individuals with conditions like dementia. Emotional regulation refers to the ability to manage and respond to one's own emotions in a healthy and adaptive way. It involves both conscious and unconscious processes that influence how we experience, express, and manage our emotions. Essentially, it's about having control over your emotional state and being able to adjust your emotional responses to different situations.

The type of music can also signal compatibility and serves a bonding. In this case, it expresses itself to sooth the saying of the mind in the music environment. In this vein, (Thomas, 2016p.6), attests that music gives connection with others (solidarity or attunement), along with the opposite, alienation, are fundamental ideas in social science that look at how the society react to music.

In fact, connectedness is a basic human need in all times and places. Connection with others through emotional healing becomes imperative. It is sometimes referred to as cohesion or trust. It is as necessary as the air we breathe because music deeply connect to emotion which can be recovered in every ramification. In every sense, the trauma which was emotionally built can be retrieved through the deep tone with titillated music. Nevertheless, this simply engaged the acoustic sound to demonstrate the efficacy of the culture of sounds as it interplays with the melody.

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALING OF TRAUMA THROUGH MUSIC RECOVERY

In this regard, it is known that there is psychological healing through music sounds as a recovery agent. In this vein, it is underlined that music is an established instrument for the well-being of a traumatic patient that transforms the healing of the individuals or in a person (Steward, 2025). However, in this case, not all traumas leave scar on the physical body. It has damaging effect on a matter if it is not well treated. In this way, music serves as a therapy in the recovery of this wound. Most of the emotional suspected cases were recovered through music. In this view, a music therapist buttressed that the journey of trauma might cause us to embark as consisting of series of processes (Steward, 2025).

It is in this vein that every situation assimilate new events can be used as the factor of music to actually recover the an internally built in trauma. The therapist established the fact that most of the traumatic experienced were improved through diagnostic adaptation of music. However, this process requires in

becoming more empathetic, more adaptable, resilient, regaining in appreciation of the value of the existing nature of the potency of music.

In this way, it is imperative to understudy the nature of this form in which it is imperative to bring recovery. This is possible in coming to terms with the trauma as a process. It often forces through the journey of open possibility which gives in to the various emphasis on personal recovery and growth. In this point, it has been noted that the therapy of music becomes relevant in the experience of trauma recovery. It is a general sense and believed that music and the traumatic individual have resolved these issues through the therapeutic ability of melodic songs and its movement.

Also, the integral path is that each one participates in the effectivity of the other. The connection establishes the fact that this same sounds have discernable strength and signals which have deepening effect on the other. It is through music that they establish their connectivity to self and others. Moreover, the period of struggle with emotional expression becomes reduced. It is essential that they gain recovery as its pillar which give striking examples of what music stand to benefit in its force and re-integration.

Recent research found that there is a connection between the brain and the heart. The implication states that the long tradition of the brain which connects the mind, heart and the brain becomes interconnected. Music therapists engaged in the process that the brain works closely with the ear that absorb sounds. This in course of time affects the mind. Nevertheless, it is in this vein that most clients of trauma seek to undo the interconnections. It is in this regard that whenever the brain absorbs music the potency of the music metamorphosis for the healing of any trauma which was taken.

The brain stirs the rhymes with the sounds and the prolong trauma receives a pleasure exposed and this neutralizes the ill-feelings. In this case, they maintained that the international interests in the relationship between rhythm and trauma has proliferated in response to recent endorsement through popular trauma discourse that reliefs on neurological mechanisms of action. The matter of this research that engages the neurosis or the brain in search of what is the reaction of the mind that a traumatized absorbed sound to recover (Karnia, 2020). In this case, it is from this point that action of findings became necessary to finish medical point. Nevertheless, the practical application as given requires attention to the subject matter. The most essential of the expression is in the term entrainment. Entertainment generally refers to the synchronization of two or more rhythmic cycles, either within a single system or between different systems. It can also describe the process of a fluid picking up and carrying another substance, like a fluid or solid. In simpler terms, it's about things aligning their rhythms or being carried along by a flow. However, it is a process that governs the alignment. In music, alignment refers to the harmonious relationship between different musical elements, such as pitch, rhythm, and harmony, and also the precise synchronization of different representations of the same music (like score and audio).

It's crucial for both composition and performance, impacting the overall sound and feel of the music. Alignment also plays a key role in music technology, enabling tasks like score following and automatic accompaniment. In the context of music, the motor domain primarily refers to the physical movements and actions involved in playing music, as well as the neural processes underlying these movements. It encompasses both the overt actions of musicians and the brain activity related to perceiving and processing

musical rhythm and structure.

The motor domain is closely linked to the psychomotor domain, which focuses on the connection between mental processes and physical movement. In the context of music, the motor domain primarily refers to the physical movements and actions involved in playing music, as well as the neural processes underlying these movements. It encompasses both the overt actions of musicians and the brain activity related to perceiving and processing musical rhythm and structure. The motor domain is closely linked to the psychomotor domain, which focuses on the connection between mental processes and physical movement.

It is a dynamic attraction that point to the timing of a music and the person that shows the differences. Also, it shows when a person becomes hyper – touched the arousal in more optimal window of tolerance. At this point the individual loses his or her emotional depression. It becomes a reviving center of attraction. Moreover, this window of tolerance takes in a lot of therapeutic in sense response into music and recovers expression in healing. In fact, the reflect and involuntary actions come together to form a basis of reconnection.

In every sense, healing through music can refer to the process of recovery from illness or from an injury of the mental part of man. It means the restoration of wholeness, and total well-being of the human organic system. "Man's organic system in music" can refer to the concept of music evolving and developing like a living organism, with interconnected parts and a sense of natural growth. This idea can be seen in compositional techniques like organicism, where a musical idea is developed and transformed throughout a piece, much like a biological organism grows and changes.

It can also refer to the influence of natural sounds and rhythms on musical composition and the human experience of music. Music can indeed be a powerful tool for healing, offering benefits for both mental and physical well-being. It can evoke emotions, unlock memories, and provide comfort, and is increasingly recognized as a therapeutic tool with applications in clinical settings and beyond.

THE THERAPEUTIC USE OF MELODIC HEALING

Similarly, the therapeutic healing involves the use of physical, melodic activity to promote physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Although, this is a new discovery of how music contributes to the curing. It acts as a therapy to the individual to set in a comprehensive knowledge to engage music as a relaxing effectiveness of healing.

In this vein, it is referred that there are healing through the vibes of music and dance. The evolving matters juxtaposes that each of the healing was as a result of the functions of the potency of the music that is embedded to it. Also, it depends on the duration of the performance of what one is given to the other. However, the therapeutic potency of melodic healing is on the point it has been given a graphic check (Aluede, 2009).

In fact, in the biblical times healing was given through music which revives and invigorates the user to overcome various ailments. This is especially to the ones that connects the mind which was internally built in trauma. Beyond the scope of this study, it is all embracing and sustainable solution to a wound that

conditions the atmosphere of this work.

CONCLUSION

In this fact-finding research, it is needful to arrive at a reasonable end. However, the therapy of has music has given more concern to the uninformed public. This is because most people may be in doubt on how music can be a powerful tool to cure trauma. However, it has been observed without delay that trauma which is a wound has gotten a departmentalized solution. In this view, the attempt of using music becomes imperative. In a related development, the use of melodious songs and movement in every ramification has come to stay. Nevertheless, some causes of trauma could be traced to sexual abuse, rape, drug addiction, and forced labor. This means that trauma could affect the mind as a terrible wound. It announces that it can be cured from the emotion internally. Music in general is a recovery remedy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having studied the therapeutic effects of music especially melodic songs on traumatic recovery, the following recommendations are made:

1. In any case of trauma, a specialist in the area of music be contacted for proper curing.
11. Healing as the name implies is a gradual process, it should be handled with patience.
111. Traumatic recovery should be seen as both traditional and westernized in giving solution through melodic songs.

REFERENCES

- Aluede, C.(2009).Healing with Music & Dance in Burgeon Competence & implication for the Nigeria music healers. Nigeria: Niger Delta University publishers.
- Gbule, J; & Nwaka,C.(2021).Religion& Music. Contemporary themes in Religious Discourse. Nigeria: Do7 concept publishers.
- Katrina, S.(2020).Music , Rhythm& Trauma. A critical interpretative Synthesis of Research Literature. South Africa: University of Norway publishers.
- Merrile, F. & William . (2014). Vine's Complete Dictionary of the Old & New Testament. U.S. A: Nelson publishers.
- Oral communications: Thursday.28th May,2025 @ Gbam , Time.3pm in Rivers State.
- Raymon, E.(2014).Introduction to the New Testament. India: Double Day publishers.
- Stanghell, G. (2017). The Therapeutic interview in mental health. A value based centered Approach.U.S. A: Cambridge University press
- Sward, I.(2025).Music as instrument of Recovery. The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research. Vol.(.2),pp.6.Retrieved [https://www. Research in South Africa](https://www.researchin-southafrica.com). Tuesday, August 5, 2025, Time .2pm.
- Thomas, S.(2014).What's love got to do with emotion in Popular Songs. New York: Retrieved [www/https/google. Ions](https://www.google.com). Tuesday, August 5, 2025. Time.2pm.
- Ursula, H. (2016). The social nature of emotion. Accessed [https/books/google.com](https://books.google.com). Saturday. 27th July, 2025. Time.2pm.
- Wotogbe, W. (2012). Religion: Modern Denigrators & Rehabilitators. An Inaugural published lecture University of Port Harcourt.28th November, 2012, @Ebitimi Banigo hall.

LAUGHTER AS THERAPY: SATIRICAL CATHARSIS AND EMOTIONAL RELEASE IN *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN*

by
Amala, Peace Ibala
Amalapeace@yahoo.com
&
Blessing Omofowe Odhe
blessodhe@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the therapeutic function of laughter in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, employing functionalist theory and drama therapy as its theoretical frameworks. Positioning satire as a tool for emotional release and social reflection, the paper analyzes how Rotimi's comic dramaturgy functions to unburden psychological and societal conflicts within a postcolonial Nigerian context. The character of Major Rahman Lejoka-Brown, whose exaggerated antics conjure both ridicule and self-examination, becomes a site of catharsis for both for the audience and for the fictional world he dwells. Through the lens of functionalist theory, laughter is studied as a soothing agent in society, while drama therapy discloses how comic performance can facilitate healing by confronting personal and collective concerns. Finally, the paper reveals that Rotimi's satirical brilliance contribute to a deeper comprehension of the therapeutic potential of African drama; as it offers more than just entertainment but also serves as a compelling form of social therapy and emotional restoration.

Keywords: *Catharsis, Drama Therapy, Functionalism, Laughter, Satire, Therapy*

INTRODUCTION

Satire is a powerful literary tool used to expose and critique societal ills, promoting positive change through humor, irony, and exaggeration. According to Femi Osofisan, literature's value lies in its subversive potential to drive explosive change, benefiting society and humanity. Satire serves as a form of social commentary, ridiculing foolishness, corruption, and negative behaviors in individuals, institutions, or society as a whole. Satire critiques societal norms, values, and institutions, highlighting flaws and shortcomings. Satire uses humour, irony, and exaggeration to convey messages and critique societal ills. Satire has the potential to drive change by challenging existing power structures and promoting critical thinking. Also, satire is not limited to contemporary writers; traditional African societies also used satire through songs, proverbs, and folktales to critique societal issues. In Nigeria, we also have great satirists apart from the Greeks and Romans, that used their creative works to expose the vices and follies in their different societies. The works aim at correcting the ills and evils prevalent in the society.

Satire plays a significant role in African theatre. African playwrights use satire to criticize and proffer solutions to the issues bedeviling the society. These societal issues range from economic, moral, political, social and others. Literature cannot be separated from society, hence literature is defined as the reflection of life. Satire manifests through the use of irony and sarcasm. Criticism in this regard can be humorous. Although, entertainment and humour are not the basic objectives, humour is usually employ to reward the coarseness of the language of criticism. Satire is effective in a society that is conscious of the standard morals and manners that are acceptable. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

Satire takes for its province a whole society and its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the

moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious". (55)

Gbemisola Adeoti notes that satire as "a socially sanctioned medium of expressing the communal purgative will" (162). This conception of satire supports the social condition of satire. According to Niyi Akingbe satire is "the act of humour or exaggeration to critique society" (183). Adenigbo and Alugin note that satire is a means by which "the prevailing irregularities and moral excesses of a person, a group of people, a race, an institution, or even a nation are exposed to ridicule (321).

Satire is often funny, a more important it is usually social corrective or constructive criticism. The laughter generated through the humour in satirical drama can have a positive impact on therapy. Laughter and humour have been shown to reduce stress hormones like cortisol, leading to a more relaxed state. Endorphins released during laughter can improve mood and overall sense of well being. Satirical drama's use of humour can help an individual develop coping mechanisms and views challenges from a different perspective. Humour improves cognitive function. Humour has been linked with enhanced cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem solving skills. Shared laughter and humour can strengthen relationship and create a sense of community.

Aristotle believed that Greek tragedy's primary function is to evoke emotions of pity and fear in the audience, leading to a state of catharsis, or emotional purgation. This process allows individuals to confront and release pent-up emotions in a controlled environment, promoting emotional relief, balance, and greater self-awareness. Catharsis purifies emotions like pity and fear, refining the individual's emotional state and promoting emotional balance. Therapeutic art, particularly tragedy, serves as a safe space for individuals to process difficult emotions, leading to emotional healing and growth. Tragedy encourages audiences to reflect on their emotions, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and the human experience. On the other hand comedy can facilitate emotional catharsis, allowing individuals to release and process difficult emotions. Laughter and humor can improve mood and reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety. Comedy can serve as a healthy coping mechanism for managing stress and promoting overall well-being. Laughter and humor can help alleviate tension and promote relaxation. Comedy provides a safe outlet for expressing and releasing pent-up emotions, such as anxiety, frustration, or sadness. Comedy can offer a fresh perspective on challenging situations, helping individuals to reframe their experiences and gain new insights. Comedy can strengthen social bonds and create a sense of community. Also, comedy can help individuals develop coping mechanisms and build resilience in the face of adversity.

Drama therapy has a rich and diverse history that spans centuries. From ancient times to the 18th century, various forms of drama and performance have been used to promote emotional release, well-being, and healing. Ancient plays, traditional rituals, and festivals incorporated therapeutic elements to support community well-being and emotional release. In the 5th century, Caelius Aurelianus categorized the mentally ill based on the severity of their condition and prescribed drama therapy accordingly. In the 18th century many asylums provided a range of therapeutic treatments, including occupational and artistic activities, to support the mentally ill. These early approaches recognized the value of creative expression in promoting emotional release, well-being, and healing. From ancient to modern times drama therapy has evolved over the centuries, incorporating various forms of performance and creative expression to support mental health and well-being. Today, drama therapy is recognized as a valuable therapeutic approach, offering a range of benefits for individuals with emotional, cognitive, and social challenges [5].

BIO-DATA OF OLAROTIMI

Ola Rotimi, a renowned Nigerian playwright and theatre director, was born on April 13, 1938, in Sapele, Nigeria, to a Yoruba father and an Ijaw mother. This cultural diversity significantly influenced his work. Rotimi was a multifaceted

individual - a playwright, stage director, producer, actor, critic, scholar, and teacher. Here's a brief overview of his life and achievements. Rotimi was exposed to traditional Nigerian arts from a young age. He attended Methodist Boys High School in Lagos and later studied theater arts at Boston University, where he earned a bachelor's degree. He then obtained a master's degree from Yale School of Drama, earning the distinction of being a Rockefeller Foundation scholar in playwriting and dramatic literature. Rotimi's plays often explored Nigeria's history and local traditions. Some notable works include; *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1968), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1966), *Kurunmi* (1971), *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* (1974), and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1985). Rotimi taught at the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) and the University of Port Harcourt. He was also a visiting professor at Macalester College in Minnesota. Rotimi's works are celebrated for their unique blend of African tradition and Western literary forms. He was awarded two Fulbright Scholarships and received the Nigerian National Order of Merit (NNOM) in 1986. Rotimi passed away on August 18, 2000, leaving behind a rich legacy in African literature and theatre.

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

The play revolves around Major Rahman Lejoka-Brown, a retired army officer who ventures into politics driven by personal gain and ambition. He is already married to two women: Mama Rashida, his late brother's wife whom he married through custom, and Sikira, the daughter of a market women union leader whom he married for political leverage. Meanwhile, his wife Liza, an American-educated medical doctor, returns to Nigeria after completing her studies, only to discover she's not the only woman in Lejoka-Brown's life.

Liza's Western values clash with the polygamous lifestyle, sparking comedic cultural conflicts. As tensions rise, Liza empowers Sikira with ideas of women's liberation, encouraging her to assert herself. The conflicts eventually resolve when Sikira joins politics and Mama Rashida relocates to the village. However, Lejoka-Brown's political career ends in failure due to his high-handedness, leaving him to regret abandoning his successful cocoa business.

DISCUSSION

The aim of satire is criticize evils and follies of the society. These vices are; oppression, corruption, victimization, economic, social and political issues. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* as a comic satire begins with Liza, who thought she owns Lejoka-Brown, and she decided to come home to her husband house after completing her medical studies in the United States. The dialogue between Mama Rashida and Polycarp, the houseboy indicates some satirical tones between them. The conversation between them portrays how potent satire is as a literary form in bringing out the weaknesses in human attitudes and societal issues that comes from them in a manner that tends to make them funny and entertaining, thereby causing the audience to laugh. Satire is used by literary artists to explore and ridicule human follies by using ironies, exaggeration and humour. Below is an example from the play:

Liza: Who and who did you mean by everyone?

Lejoka-Brown: You mean?

Liza: Don't you know what I mean?

Lejoka-Brown: Oh, I mean... emm... people emm... dependant... you people of the house... extended family... you know citizens.

Liza: What kind of citizen?

Lejoka-Brown: Hunh? (35-36)

The dialogue above shows elements of satire. Lejoka-Brown is dumbfounded and does not know what to say. This makes the scene hilarious.

The conversation of Liza and Sikira below is humorous because of its satirical tone and the irony embedded in it.

Liza: Someone right to have told you, my dear girl that it is not proper for a housemaid to go peeping into the bedroom of her master at right or any other...

Sikira: Housemaid (To mama Rashida) Did you you hear that grasshopper. I told you, she would come and kick everyone around.

Liza: What did you said?

Sikira: Oohoo, come you said you are a doctor? I will show who I am.

Mama Rashida: Patience, you patience I say.

Sikira: Let go

Mama Rashida: That fowl wants her proud feather plucked (24).

Liza thinks being more educated than the other two wives of Lejoka-Brown makes her believes she is superior and calls Sikira a maid. Sikira does not tolerate being called a maid. This makes her fights back. She calls her a grasshopper, and mama Rashida who to calm Sikira calls Liza "that fowl".

There is another element of satire in the conversation of Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo when he receives news of the bye election result.

Lejoka-Brown: I lost a by election to a crab...a baby (wrinkles paper out of the envelopes and starts unfolding it) mmh. This is war (real cable, the contents are disconcerting) unurniyaallah.

Okonkwo: Bad news

Lejoka-Brown: Gamalin -20!

Okonkwo: Your politics?

Lejoka-Brown: My life

Okonkwo: You aha -a- at? (7-8)

Lejoka-Brown discusses politics with Okonkwo. The conversation reveals that satire is aimed at ridiculing human follies and weaknesses. Elements of humour can also be seen in the conversation that followed between the duo.

Lejoka-Brown: She's arriving at five O'clock.

Okonkwo: Arriving!

Lejoka-Brown: From America

Okonkwo: America? Another wife?

Okonkwo expresses great shock when he hears Lejoka-Brown has another wife coming from the United States. This hilarious scene is an attempt by Ola Rotimi to ridicule polygamy.

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, utilizes satire to critique societal ills, promoting emotional release and catharsis. The leverages humour to address issues like social class, oppression, polygamy, corruption, politics and social inequality. Through humour and irony, the promotes emotional release, catharsis, and self-reflection illustrating the therapeutic potential of laughter. The play employs satire to critique postcolonial leadership and gender relations. Through the character of Lejoka-Brown, a self-centered and incompetent politician, Rotimi highlights the absurdities of applying military tactics to political problems. The play's satirical tone is characterized by exaggeration and absurdity, emphasizing the flaws in Lejoka-Brown's leadership and the societal norms that enable them.

This absurdity is shown in the extract below:

LEJOKA-BROWN: Gentlemen, our election campaign plans must follow a pattern of military strategy known as surprise and attack. Now, what is: surprise and attack? Surprise and attack, Gentlemen, is Now listen... we shall concentrate our early campaigns on the outskirts...

[Throws his arms up]

Asaba, shake up Benin, hop over to Warri and fullstop.

[Indicates on map with a cane]

Gentlemen, I said any que...

brothers, by the time our enemies rally together to put up a resistance

our political enemies in the big towns we keep our hands off the cities. For the time being mark you.

Then the ATTACK...

For the time being. One rat at a time; you chase two, you miss both.

drive from the small towns and villages right into the big towns and cities. Our political enemies

[More ardently]

our open arms... we welcome Ogbomosho... Ilorin opens up the door, and we're in the north,

ONE MEMBER: S-i-l-e-n-c-e!

Harcourt...sweep Calabar... we begin campaigning in Onitsha... cross over the bridge, dance through

In the villages... in the tiny fishing suburbs... and so on. Like a very busy husband who cannot afford

Well... Gentlemen... any query so far?

[Mumbling... whisperings: reactions by other members]

...all over. We carry Ibadan... Abeokuta falls under our feet... we uproot Ilesha... Oyo trembles into

[Quiet prevail again]

[Dramatically mops the sweat from his brow with a handkerchief]

[Clears his throat]

are...SURPRISED.

LEJOKA-BROWN: Now then. About one month before election day, we launch a sudden two-pronged

[No answer]

Gentlemen. Once there, an arm of our propaganda brigade crosses over to Jos, Jos to Oturkpo,

heading south... Enugu puts up a tough fight, we hop over Enugu... march through Port

a direct clash with a difficult wife, at the moment, we must steer clear of a face to face meeting with

From city to city, we run over the whole State with a heavy artillery of campaign speeches. And,

[Seven members pop up instantly, speaking simultaneously] (67-67)

The satire in the extract above stems from the absurd notion that military solutions can effectively address political issues, mirroring a broader critique of military dictatorship in postcolonial Africa.

Rotimi skillfully employs humor and satirical dialogue to drive social and political commentary in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. The play's fast-paced dialogue-heavy scenes reveal the absurdity of the male characters, particularly Lejoka-Brown. A notable example is the airport scene, where Lejoka-Brown and Okonkwo's plan to keep Liza away from the other women is both humorous and ridiculous. This scene showcases Lejoka-Brown's self-aggrandizing persona, dubbed "the superman", and highlights the play's central figure of ridicule. The extract below portrays the humorous scene.

OKONKWO: That must be her plane now!

[The men turn, facing him.]

POLYCARP: Na true Oga Major –I no craze yet.

POLYCARP: [louder]. Major!

When did I become your joke-mate?

POLYCARP: I swear, master, make God hammer me for head if say na

POLYCARP: Di madam -from America.

OKONKWO: Maybe her plane arrived ahead of schedule.

LEJOKA-BROWN: Hunh?

OKONKWO: Come where?

[They start moving off.]

Di 'yawo done come for house, sah!

POLYCARP: Beg to report sah!

[Threatens to strike POLYCARP]

LEJOKA-BROWN: [to POLYCARP]. You mean she has entered our house...

[Polycarp bursts in urgently, panting.]

LEJOKA-BROWN: [masking his fright]. Are you listening to the crazy idiot?

on... her own two feet?

LEJOKA-BROWN: But she said 5 O'clock!

POLYCARP: I swear, master, make God hammer me for head if say na

LEJOKA-BROWN: Liza take eye see Mama Rashida?

POLYCARP: She see 'am gaan* -dem two.

LEJOKA-BROWN: Lai lai!

POLYCARP: Yes, Major, she see Mama Rashida well-well.

POLYCARP: Sah?

Looks like your master needs toilet paper!

[POLYCARP stands confused.]

the way one does over a pit toilet. OKONKWO watches him curiously then beckons to POLYCARP]

OKONKWO: [with impish delight] Here boy.

[Slowly, speechless, LEJOKA-BROWN begins to sink down absently, ending up in a vulgar squat -

OKONKWO: And she saw... the other women?

LEJOKA-BROWN: What about Sikira?

[Hands POLYCARP a coin.]

Hurry, go buy some!

[POLYCARP takes off.]

LEJOKA-BROWN [peremptorily]: Hey! What's the matter? Hunh?

go latrine, he go take shokoto put for nyash; he carry damask agbada cover body, take cap knock for

POLYCARP: Sorry sah!

LEJOKA-BROWN: I see...for who?

Madman, where are you going?

LEJOKA-BROWN: Ehen? I see... Na so your papa dey take shit? Hunh? Answer. When your papa wan head finish, then he come butudey shit for International Airport?

[POLYCARPhalts.]

LEJOKA-BROWN: Ehen? I see... Na so your papa dey take shit? Hunh? Answer. When your papa wan go latrine, he go take shokoto put for nyash; he carry damask agbada cover body, take cap knock for head finish, hen he come butudey shit for International Airport?

POLYCARP: Sorry sah!

[LEJOKA-BROWN cast a malevolent glance in the direction of OKONKWO who is rolling on the bench, delirious with laughter over his friend's discomfiture.] (52-54)

In "Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again", Ola Rotimi employs a satirical tone to critique societal expectations surrounding marriage and gender roles in contemporary Nigeria. The play's comedic elements highlight the absurdities of daily life, inviting readers to critically reflect on their cultural norms. By balancing serious themes with accessibility, Rotimi positions his work within a broader discourse of contemporary African literature that seeks to engage a diverse readership. The use of humor is strategic, allowing readers to engage with serious issues without feeling overwhelmed.

CONCLUSION

Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by masterfully employs satire as a therapeutic tool, offering a cathartic release of emotions through laughter. By ridiculing the absurdities of post-independence Nigerian society, Rotimi's play provides a unique lens through which to examine the complexities of human experience. The play's satirical elements not only critique societal ills but also offer a form of emotional release, allowing audiences to confront and process their emotions in a safe and humorous way. Ultimately, the play demonstrates the power of satire as a therapeutic tool, highlighting its potential to promote emotional healing and social commentary.

WORKS CITED

- Ngugi, Wa Thiong'o. *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics*, Heinemann, 1972.
- Jones, Phil. *Drama as Therapy: Theatre as Living*, Routledge, 1996.
- Rotimi, Ola. *The Gods Are Not to Blame*, Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Rotimi, Ola. *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Rotimi, Ola. *Kurunmi*, Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Rotimi, Ola. *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*, Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Rotimi, Ola. *Hopes of the Living Dead*, Spectrum Books, 1988.
- Adenigbo, Ademola, and Matthew Alugbin. "A Satirical Reading of Wole Soyinka's A Play of Giants", *International Journal of Literature and Arts*, vol. 8, no. 6, 2020, pp. 320-325.
- Adeoti, Gbemisola R. "Satire in Modern Nigeria Theatre: A Historical Exploration", *Ife Studies in African Literature and the Arts*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2000.
- Akingbe, Niyi. "The Articulation of Social Decay: Satire in Contemporary Nigerian Poetry", *African Study Monograph*, vol. 35, no. 3/4, 2014, pp. 108-203.

**HEALING THROUGH TELLING: DISPLACEMENT, MEMORY, AND
THE PERSONAL NARRATIVE IN CLEMANTINE WAMARIYA'S
*THE GIRL WHO SMILED BEADS***

By

Rita Emonena Otutu-Flo

Department of English,
School of Languages,
College of Education, Warri, Delta.
E-mai: ritzflonow@gmail.com
Tel: 08034056944; 07082226741

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the therapeutic function of personal narrative in Clemantine Wamariya's memoir, *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, foregrounding how storytelling becomes a vital space for healing from displacement, trauma, and identity rupture. Wamariya's journey—from escaping the Rwandan genocide to navigating fragmented refugee experiences across African countries—offers an intimate account of the psychological and emotional toll of forced migration. The memoir functions as a narrative therapy that enables the reassembly of memory and identity in the wake of trauma. Drawing on narrative theory, trauma studies, and African literary criticism, the paper situates Wamariya's account within a broader African reality—particularly resonating with the Nigerian context, where Boko Haram insurgency and ethno-religious conflicts have rendered many internally displaced. This comparative framework illuminates how memoir, as a genre, transcends mere testimony to become a mode of resistance, survival, and emotional reclamation. Ultimately, the paper argues that Wamariya's text, and others like it, serve not only as individual catharsis but also as socio-political interventions that humanize statistics and challenge collective amnesia.

Keywords: *Memoir, Displacement, Trauma, Narrative Healing, African Refugee Experience*
Introduction

In her memoir *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*, Clemantine Wamariya, co-authored with Elizabeth Weil, offers a profound exploration of displacement, memory, and the restorative power of personal narrative. Published in 2018, the memoir traces Wamariya's experiences as a Rwandan genocide survivor who, at the age of six, fled the 1994 genocide with her sister, embarking on a perilous journey across multiple African countries before resettling in the United States. Through a non-linear narrative structure, Wamariya confronts the fragmented nature of her memories, weaving a tapestry of trauma, resilience, and identity reconstruction. This paper examines how Wamariya's act of storytelling serves as a mechanism for healing, enabling her to reclaim agency over her past while challenging reductive Western narratives about refugees. By analyzing the interplay of displacement and memory in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, this study argues that personal narrative becomes a vital tool for processing trauma and asserting humanity in the aftermath of violence and dislocation. Drawing on trauma theory and postcolonial perspectives, this analysis situates Wamariya's work within broader discussions of refugee literature, highlighting the transformative potential of narrative in navigating the complexities of survival and selfhood.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Memoir has increasingly gained traction in African literary scholarship as a medium through which marginalized voices reclaim agency, reconfigure history, and articulate trauma. Scholars such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson highlight memoir's potential for self-representation and empowerment, especially

among historically silenced groups (Smith and Watson 12). In the African context, memoirs by women, survivors of conflict, or displaced individuals often resist dominant political narratives, creating alternative histories from below.

Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* fits squarely into this tradition. The memoir not only reconstructs her life across borders but also foregrounds the emotional and psychological fragmentation caused by war. As she shifts between timelines and places—Rwanda, Burundi, Congo, South Africa, and the U.S.—Wamariya invites readers into the interiority of a refugee experience that often eludes linear narration or easy coherence.

The non-linear structure and emotive tone of the memoir resonate with other African personal narratives, such as Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, though Wamariya's voice is distinct in its quiet confrontation of dignity lost and reclaimed. Scholars like Gagiano argue that African memoirs “transform personal memory into cultural and political commentary” (Gagiano 89), a characteristic clearly observable in Wamariya's work.

Trauma theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals process and articulate unspeakable experiences. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as an event so overwhelming that it escapes full representation, manifesting instead in belated, fragmented ways (Caruth 4). This theory is evident in Wamariya's memoir, where memory is fractured and involuntary—surfacing through smells, places, and silences.

Dori Laub's notion of the survivor as both witness and narrator is equally relevant. Laub asserts that trauma survivors often reconstruct their experiences only through the act of telling, which itself becomes therapeutic (Laub 70). Wamariya's narrative, rich in sensory recall and emotional candor, illustrates this process of delayed articulation and eventual reassembly of the self through storytelling.

The intersection of displacement, trauma, and personal narrative in African literature, particularly in the context of Nigeria's Boko Haram insurgency, provides a rich framework for understanding how individuals and communities process socio-political violence and seek healing. This literature review examines primary texts, trauma theory, socio-political dimensions, and therapeutic approaches to displacement, with a focus on Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* and its broader resonance with narratives emerging from Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis. By synthesizing these perspectives, this research work highlights how storytelling serves as both a response to trauma and a means of reclaiming agency in the face of socio-political upheaval.

PRIMARY TEXTS AND DISPLACEMENT IN AFRICAN CONTEXTS

Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* (2018) stands as a pivotal text in refugee literature, offering a firsthand account of displacement caused by the Rwandan genocide. Wamariya's narrative details her journey across multiple African nations, navigating physical and psychological dislocation. The memoir's fragmented structure mirrors the disjointed experience of displacement, emphasizing the loss of home, identity, and cultural continuity. Similarly, other African literary works, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), explore displacement within Nigeria during the Biafran War, addressing the enduring impact of conflict on personal and collective identities. While Wamariya's text focuses on a child's perspective of genocide and exile, Adichie's novel situates displacement within a historical Nigerian context, highlighting parallels with contemporary crises like the Boko Haram insurgency. Both texts underscore how narratives articulate the human cost of displacement, offering insights into resilience and survival.

In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency, literary and testimonial accounts, though less formalized in published memoirs, emerge through survivor narratives and media reports. For instance, the Chibok schoolgirls' abduction in 2014, documented in sources like the *International Crisis Group* reports, reveals the gendered dimensions of displacement, where women and girls face sexual violence and forced recruitment. These accounts, while not always literary, parallel Wamariya's memoir in their emphasis on personal storytelling as a means of documenting trauma and asserting agency. The scarcity of published literary works directly addressing Boko Haram's impact suggests a gap in the canon, making Wamariya's narrative a critical lens for understanding similar experiences of displacement in Nigeria. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-women-and-boko-haram-insurgency>)

TRAUMA THEORY AND NARRATIVE HEALING

Trauma theory provides a framework for analyzing how individuals process and narrative experiences of violence and displacement. Cathy Caruth's seminal work, *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), posits that trauma disrupts linear memory, resulting in fragmented narratives that reflect the psyche's attempt to grapple with overwhelming events. Wamariya's memoir exemplifies this, as her non-linear storytelling captures the disjointed nature of traumatic memory, allowing her to piece together her identity across time and space. Similarly, Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) emphasizes the therapeutic role of narrative in restoring agency, arguing that telling one's story helps survivors integrate traumatic experiences into their sense of self. In the context of Boko Haram, studies like those by Granville (2020) highlight the psychological trauma inflicted on displaced populations, particularly children and women, noting the need for community-based mental health interventions to address post-traumatic stress. (<https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.31920/2732-5008/2022/v3n1a1>)

In African contexts, trauma is often collective—embedded in genocide, civil wars, and systemic violence. The application of trauma theory to African displacement narratives reveals how storytelling serves as a form of resistance against erasure. Thus, memoir becomes a dual testimony: of the self and the collective. Scholars such as Stef Craps have critiqued the Eurocentrism of trauma studies and advocated for its decolonization, stressing the need to account for postcolonial histories of violence (Craps 13). Wamariya's work aligns with this postcolonial turn by situating personal suffering within broader geopolitical ruptures. For instance, Wamariya's narrative challenges Western stereotypes of refugees by centering her voice, while survivor testimonies from Boko Haram-affected regions, as documented in *Conflict and Health* (2018), underscore the importance of narrative in reclaiming dignity amidst dehumanizing violence. These accounts align with Herman's concept of “restorative narrative,” where storytelling fosters healing by enabling survivors to articulate their pain and rebuild social connections. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8233023/>)

SOCIO-POLITICAL DIMENSIONS OF DISPLACEMENT

The socio-political roots of displacement in African nations, particularly Nigeria, are deeply tied to systemic inequalities and governance failures. The Boko Haram insurgency, which escalated around 2009, has displaced over 2.4 million people in Nigeria's northeast, exacerbating poverty, unemployment, and ethno-religious tensions. Scholars like Udounwa (2013) argue that Boko Haram's rise is fueled by Nigeria's geopolitical structure and socio-economic disparities, which create fertile ground for insurgent ideologies. This mirrors the socio-political upheaval in Rwanda during the 1990s, where ethnic divisions and colonial legacies precipitated the genocide that displaced Wamariya. Both contexts highlight how state fragility and historical grievances contribute to mass displacement. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8233023/>) (<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria/>)

Literary and scholarly works further illuminate these dynamics. Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* portrays the

socio-political complexities of the Biafran War, where ethnic and political marginalization led to widespread displacement, a precursor to contemporary crises like Boko Haram. Similarly, Wosu et al. (2014) note that Boko Haram's insurgency has caused significant human rights abuses and economic disruption, undermining national security and social cohesion. These socio-political factors underscore the need for narratives that not only document personal experiences but also critique systemic failures, as seen in Wamariya's reflections on the global indifference to Rwanda's plight. (<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria/>)

Nigeria, in particular, presents a case study of internal displacement rooted in the Boko Haram insurgency. Since its escalation in 2009, Boko Haram has displaced millions, with entire communities in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states turned into refugees in their own country (IDMC 2024 Report), not forgetting Zamfara, and Benue States.

Literary representations of this displacement have emerged in fictional and non-fictional forms. Helon Habila's *The Chibok Girls* blends reportage with personal reflection, shedding light on the pain and loss endured by families of kidnapped schoolgirls. Meanwhile, these girls, like Wamariya, had dreams that were aborted by insurgency and war. They were denied their childhood fantasies. According to Wamariya,

My dreams, at age four, were far less adventurous. I wanted to be fed ice cream and pineapple cakes. I wanted to wear a teal-blue school uniform and grow into Claire's clothes (19).

The above is a poignant reflection of how conflict can disrupt and shatter the innocence of childhood, forcing young minds to confront harsh realities far too soon. The fact that Wamariya's dreams were aborted by insurgency highlights the devastating impact of violence on children's lives and the importance of protecting their childhood.

Similarly, in her short stories, Nigerian writer Elnathan John captures the anxiety and instability in the northern regions plagued by insurgency. While Wamariya's memoir is geographically set outside Nigeria, its themes—sudden flight, family separation, emotional numbness, and struggle for identity—mirror the Nigerian IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) experience. As Uwem Akpan notes in his own trauma-informed stories, the African child is often caught between silence and survival, between memory and erasure. This parallel allows Wamariya's narrative to resonate deeply within Nigerian contexts of displacement.

THERAPEUTICS OF WRITING: MEMOIR AS EMOTIONAL AND POLITICAL HEALING

The therapeutic function of writing has long been explored in psychological and literary studies. James Pennebaker's research on expressive writing shows how the act of writing about trauma leads to measurable improvements in mental and physical health (Pennebaker 162). In literary terms, memoir is not just cathartic but reparative—a way of ordering the chaos of memory and pain.

In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, Wamariya writes not simply to recall but to reframe her trauma. By juxtaposing past and present, her narrative reclaims voice, identity, and meaning. As Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o emphasizes, language and narrative are tools of liberation (Ngũgĩ 90). Wamariya's memoir thus functions as both personal salvation and socio-political intervention—challenging narratives that dehumanize refugees and offering a counter-memory grounded in dignity and resilience.

In Nigeria, where state and media often depersonalize the IDP crisis, memoir-like narratives—whether

written or oral—offer possibilities for healing, remembering, and justice. As such, Wamariya's memoir is not just an individual story but part of a transnational discourse on displacement, survival, and the redemptive power of telling.

ANALYSIS OF *THE GIRL WHO SMILED BEADS*: SYNTHESIS AND RELEVANCE TO BOKO HARAM

The literature reveals a synergy between personal narrative, trauma theory, and socio-political analysis in addressing displacement. Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* serves as a critical lens for understanding the Boko Haram insurgency, where survivors face similar challenges of trauma, loss, and identity fragmentation. While Nigeria-specific literary narratives are less prevalent, survivor testimonies and scholarly analyses underscore the need for narrative-driven therapeutic interventions. Trauma theory illuminates how fragmented storytelling reflects the psychological impact of displacement, while socio-political perspectives highlight the structural causes of insurgency. Therapeutic approaches, such as restorative justice and the SAFE model, offer pathways for healing that resonate with Wamariya's narrative journey. Together, these frameworks suggest that personal narratives can serve as both a personal catharsis and a socio-political critique, fostering healing and resilience in the face of displacement.

DISPLACEMENT AND THE FRACTURING OF IDENTITY

Clemantine's narrative is shaped by constant displacement—from Rwanda to Burundi, then across six African countries before settling in the United States. This physical journey mirrors an internal fragmentation. She reflects: “Every time we moved, I left a part of myself behind—my language, my culture, my childhood” (Wamariya and Weil 45).

This passage captures the emotional erosion that displacement causes: a kind of unmooring where identity becomes fluid, incomplete, and insecure. Her repeated moves prevent the formation of stable relationships and continuity of self.

This mirrors the experience of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northern Nigeria, particularly those from Borno and Yobe States, who have fled Boko Haram attacks. Studies report that displaced children in IDP camps often suffer from identity confusion, disrupted schooling, and isolation (Abah and Gambo 111). Just like Clemantine, they live in liminality—“neither here nor there”—cut off from their cultural roots and national belonging.

In both cases, displacement is not only geographical but psychological and existential, breaking the continuity of selfhood. Memoir becomes a means of stitching identity back together, giving narrative coherence to a disjointed past.

MEMORY AND TRAUMA: FRAGMENTED, RECURRING, AND REWRITTEN

Memory in Wamariya's memoir is not linear—it emerges in fragments, smells, and sensations. As she clearly states, “I remembered things out of order. I remembered sounds and smells. I remembered nothing, then everything” (Wamariya and Weil 66).

This reflects Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma as an experience that cannot be fully processed at the time of its occurrence and resurfaces later in flashbacks or intrusive thoughts (Caruth 4). Clemantine often experiences these flashbacks unexpectedly—in school, in stores, or in the company of well-meaning strangers.

Similarly, survivors of recent mass killings in Benue, Zamfara and Plateau States (2025) report episodic and

involuntary recollections triggered by sounds of gunfire, loud knocks, or even certain foods (Daily Trust). In both contexts, trauma resides in the body and the subconscious, long after the threat has passed.

Yet, by writing through this trauma, Clemantine reclaims power over her memory. The act of narration allows her to reorganize and make sense of what had once seemed senseless. As she affirms, “I needed to tell my story so I could stop being haunted by it” (Wamariya and Weil 88). And what story did she tell? The devastating impact of war on Wamariya and her family is a harrowing testament to the trauma it inflicts. She recounts:

The next day was Friday. Of course, I didn't go to school. We needed to start making up for so much lost time. Yet I couldn't look at my parents— they were ghosts. I felt gratitude, yes. Oprah had brought my parents to me. But I also felt kicked in the stomach, as though my life were some psychologist's perverse experiment: Let's see how far we can take a person down, and then how far we can raise her up, and then let's see what happens! Saturday, my family, along with the Thomases, drove up the lakeshore to the Chicago Botanic Garden, where we stared at the Illinois lilies and roses. We all wanted these to be beautiful links to the lilies and roses in Kigali, threads knitting this present to that past, but everything was awkward, and it felt as though cameras were still following us around (16)

This narrative transcends the unimaginable pain of separation caused by war, resonating not only with the experiences of those affected by the Rwandan genocide but also with the struggles of people in Nigeria, particularly in the Middle Belt and Niger Delta Regions (Edo State) where violence has claimed countless lives, torn families apart, and left deep scars.

SILENCING, SHAME, AND THE RIGHT TO SPEAK

One of the most heartrending struggles in Clemantine's healing journey is her battle against silencing—by society, institutions, and even family. She describes being paraded at a White House event as a “Rwandan refugee”:

“I was tired of being told who I was. I didn't want to be anyone's story but my own” (103).

Her frustration reflects the moral injury of being reduced to a symbol or statistic, which erases personal complexity. Nigerian IDP survivors report similar objectification. Victims of Boko Haram often feel spoken for—by media, by politicians, or by aid workers—with little room to voice their experiences in their own words (Kure and Auta 2023). It appears like Wamariya's mothers instruction not to talk:

My mother didn't care. She just handed me a bag of clothes and put me in the van alongside Claire and made me promise to behave. As we left she said, “Please do not talk” (27).

If the victims are muted, how then would the world out there know the real nature of their pains? How would the gravity of the psychological damage caused by war, communal clashes an insurgency be know? Until the true nature of the devastating nature of these is, insurgency will continue, and thrive in an alarming rate.

Clemantine's memoir is an act of self-authorship. She decides to break free from, “Do not talk”. She does not simply recount trauma but interrogates the telling itself—what it means to own one's story. In this way, literature becomes a form of resistance. It says: I will not be silenced. I will speak for myself.

RECONNECTION AND NARRATIVE HEALING

Throughout the memoir, Clemantine yearns for reconnection—with family, with her pre-war self, and with a community that understands. Her reunion with her parents, while joyful, is also emotionally complex: “I

didn't know how to fit myself back into their lives... My parents were strangers. And I was a stranger to myself" (190).

This emotional displacement is familiar among Nigerian IDPs returning to villages that no longer exist or that feel alien due to trauma. Many youths in Borno and Adamawa describe struggling to reintegrate, feeling that "home" no longer exists in any meaningful way (UNHCR 2024). To say this is worse off with people in Benue State, will be an understatement.

But healing for Clemantine does not come from perfect closure—it comes from reframing her identity through storytelling. She begins to write, not as a victim but as a survivor, thinker, and activist.

"I am not a story of despair. I am a story of becoming" (Wamariya and Weil 217).

This is the therapeutic power of memoir it allows survivors to transform pain into purpose, silence into speech, and chaos into coherence. It is this same model that Nigerian trauma survivors could adapt with cultural sensitivity to reclaim voice and restore wholeness.

In *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* therefore, Clemantine Wamariya exemplifies the complex path from trauma to healing through the written word. Her memoir demonstrates that healing is not forgetfulness, but memory re-narrated; not escape from the past, but integration with it. Her journey parallels that of many Nigerians affected by insurgency and displacement offering a literary template for narrative resistance, self-reclamation, and collective memory.

By drawing on memoir, literature opens a healing circle by reconnection where the wounded speak, the silenced remembers, and the fragmented self begins to mend.

TRANSLATING NARRATIVE HEALING INTO PRACTICE: LESSONS FROM WAMARIYA'S MEMOIR FOR NIGERIA'S DISPLACEMENT CRISIS

The insights from Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* reveal not only the personal journey of healing through memoir but also the broader potential of storytelling as a therapeutic, educational, and sociopolitical tool. These lessons have critical implications for Nigeria's growing population of internally displaced persons (IDPs), especially those affected by insurgency, banditry, and ethno-religious violence. Below are specific ways in which Wamariya's model of narrative healing can be adapted to the Nigerian context:

Educational Integration: Trauma-Informed Literary Curricula. A developed and integrated trauma-sensitive literature can be incorporated into school curricula in IDP camps and post-conflict communities.

This will be best suitable for those in IDP camps because, like Wamariya, many displaced children in Nigeria are deprived of formal education. Reintroducing them to learning through culturally relevant memoirs can serve as both cognitive stimulation and emotional engagement.

Actionable Strategy: Select African memoirs (e.g., *The Girl Who Smiled Beads*, *The Chibok Girls* by Helon Habila) and build discussion guides around identity, healing, and resilience. Encourage students to reflect and respond with their own stories, drawings, or performances.

This will in turn encourage literacy, emotional expression, and reconnection with personal agency.

Counseling and Mental Health: Narrative Therapy in IDP Camps will give room for letting go of bottled up emotions. Thus, it will become necessary to train local counselors and humanitarian workers in narrative therapy and expressive writing techniques, who will be able to relate with the traumatic and therapeutic

process of those in these camps.

As can be observed from the text, Wamariya's healing began when she gained the space and language to tell her story. For Nigerian IDPs—especially children and adolescents—trauma often remains unarticulated. There is need to encourage a purposeful articulation towards healing.

This can be successfully achieved by establishing Storytelling Circles within camps, where survivors can tell or write their stories in local languages. These sessions can be guided by trauma-informed counselors and facilitated through drawings or oral testimony for those who are non-literate. This will enhance emotional regulation, build community, and prevent long-term psychological breakdown.

Literary and Cultural Institutions: Centering Survivor Narratives. By creating platforms (journals, podcasts, exhibitions, festivals) that spotlight memoirs and testimonies of displaced persons, the IDP will know that they are not alone.

For instance, as shown in Wamariya's case, literature not only heals the writer but also educates and humanizes the reader. When survivor narratives are publicly shared, they shift public consciousness and policy.

Therefore, launching a national competition or anthologies for displaced youth to submit poetry, short memoirs, or audio stories, for instance, in partnership with institutions like ANA (Association of Nigerian Authors) or NLNG Prize platforms to promote such initiatives, will go a long way to encourage speaking out. This in turn validates survivor voices, challenges stigma, and builds an archive of lived histories from conflict zones.

Policy and Humanitarian Programming: Healing as a Human Right. Advocate for policy frameworks that recognize healing through narrative as an essential component of post-conflict rehabilitation. This is because; humanitarian aid should not focus on food, shelter, and physical security only, neglecting emotional and psychological rehabilitation. As portrayed in Wamariya's memoir, healing the inner world is just as urgent as feeding the stomach of IDP.

Consequently, governmental and non-governmental agencies (e.g., NEMA, UNHCR Nigeria, UNICEF) should be encouraged to include storytelling-based trauma recovery in national IDP response plans. It will make room for a holistic reintegration of survivors, with attention to mental wellness and cultural reinvention.

Digital Platforms and Youth Engagement: Storytelling for Belonging. Leveraging mobile and online platforms to encourage displaced youth to share and archive their stories digitally, will be a plus in the programme in helping for self-recovery.

As seen in Wamariya's experience, visibility and the act of telling are intertwined with healing. Nigerian youth, even in IDP camps, are often digitally connected. The digital space should be utilized positively.

Developing a mobile app or WhatsApp-based initiative where displaced persons can upload voice notes, short writings, or videos shared anonymously if preferred, would not be a bad idea, as it will help build a community of shared experience and promote digital inclusion in post-trauma healing.

The power of personal narrative as seen in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* is not restricted to individual catharsis; it holds expansive potential for communal healing and national memory work. In Nigeria where insurgency has dislocated millions storytelling is not a luxury; it is a necessity.

It is through telling that wounds are acknowledged, dignity is restored, and futures are imagined.

SUMMARY

This paper has explored Clemantine Wamariya's *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* as a compelling testament to

the healing power of personal narrative, particularly within the contexts of war, displacement, and identity fragmentation. Through close textual analysis and engagement with trauma theory, the memoir reveals how storytelling becomes both a therapeutic act and a form of resistance allowing survivors to reclaim agency, process memory, and reassemble shattered identities.

Wamariya's journey from silence to speech, from being a faceless refugee to a self-defined narrator, underscores the transformative potential of memoir. Her experiences resonate deeply with the realities faced by displaced persons in Northern Nigeria, many of whom live with the psychological wounds of Boko Haram violence, communal killings, and forced migration. The memoir's relevance lies not merely in its thematic overlap with the Nigerian situation, but in its demonstration of how personal testimony can bridge broken memory and reframe trauma into meaning.

Furthermore, the paper has outlined practical applications for adapting narrative healing approaches in the Nigerian context through education, counseling, cultural production, policy design, and youth engagement. These are not abstract ideals; they are urgent necessities in a society still grappling with the human cost of displacement. As Clemantine herself reflects, "Telling my story was the only way to stop being a story someone else told" (Wamariya and Weil 216). Her words remind us that "to tell is to heal", to write is to reclaim, and to be heard is to begin becoming whole again.

Ultimately, literature emerges not just as a record of suffering but as a circle of healing where silence is broken, grief is named, and memory becomes a place not of imprisonment, but of restoration. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* offers us more than a memoir; it offers us a model a deeply human, emotionally intelligent, and politically necessary way of confronting trauma through the narrative act.

CONCLUSION

Memoir in *The Girl Who Smiled Beads* offers a transformative template for healing, resistance, and memory. By reclaiming her story, Clemantine Wamariya illustrates how personal narrative becomes a site of emotional restoration and cultural survival. This insight holds immense potential for conflict-affected populations in Nigeria, where healing must begin with voice, dignity, and story.

WORKS CITED

- Abah, Kingsley, and Fatima Gambo. "Childhood Interrupted: Post-Insurgency Trauma Among Displaced Children in Borno." *African Journal of Child Psychology*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2024, pp. 103–120.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Knopf, 2006.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Craps, Stef. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Daily Trust. "Over 150 Killed in Plateau Attack." *Daily Trust*, 1 Jan. 2025.
- Dunn, G. "The Impact of the Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeast Nigeria on Childhood Wasting: A Double-Difference Study." *Conflict and Health*, vol. 13, 2018, doi:10.1186/s13031-018-0136-2. (<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8233023/>)
- Gagiano, Annie. "Africa's Female Autobiographers." *Current Writing*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, pp. 84–102.
- Granville, C. K. "The Impact of Boko Haram Insurgency on the People of Borno State." *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*, 2020, scholar works. waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=10168&context=dissertations. (<https://journals.co.za/doi/abs/10.31920/2732-5008/2022/v3n1a1>)
- Habila, Helon. *The Chibok Girls*. Harper Collins, 2016.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.

- hooks, bell. *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*. South End Press, 1989.
- IDMC. Nigeria: *Internal Displacement Report*. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024.
- Kure, Zainab, and Peter Auta. "Narrating the Self in Silence: IDPs in Nigeria and the Politics of Absence." *Nigerian Journal of Peace and Development*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2023, pp. 78–92.
- Laub, Dori. "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1992, pp. 57–74.
- Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. Heinemann, 1986.
- P "Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency." *International Crisis Group*, 5 Dec. 2016, www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-women-and-boko-haram-insurgency. (<https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/nigeria-women-and-boko-haram-insurgency>)
- ennebaker, James W. *Opening Up by Writing It Down: How Expressive Writing Improves Health and Eases Emotional Pain*. Guilford Press, 2016.
- Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*. University of Minnesota P, 2010.
- Udounwa, Samuel. "Boko Haram and National Security Challenges in Nigeria." *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2013, pp. 45–62. (<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria/>)
- "UNDP Nigeria: Strengthening Resilience in the Face of Boko Haram." *United Nations Development Programme*, 23 June 2021, www.undp.org. (<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/ng/Assessing-the-Impact-of-Conflict-on-Development-in-NE-Nigeria---The-Report.pdf>)
- UNHCR Nigeria. IDP Protection and Reintegration Report. UNHCR, 2024.
- Wamariya, Clemantine, and Elizabeth Weil. *The Girl Who Smiled Beads: A Story of War and What Comes After*. Broadway Books, 2018.
- Wosu, Eze, and Destiny E. Agwanwo. "Boko Haram Insurgency and National Security Challenges in Nigeria: An Analysis of a Failed State." *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: C Sociology and Culture*, vol. 14, no. 7, 2014, pp. 10–19. (<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria/>)
- Zehr, Howard. *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*. Good Books, 2002 (<https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria/>)

CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS AND MENTAL HEALING: THE INTERSECTION OF ART AND MEDICINE

BY

Ugochukwu Kingsley NWOMBU, PhD

Fine and Applied Arts Department

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Port Harcourt

ugochukwu.nwombu@iaue.edu.ng +2348035251748

ABSTRACT

The intersection of art and medicine has garnered increasing attention as a vital area of exploration in the realm of mental healing. This paper aims to examine the profound impact of creative expression on mental health, highlighting how artistic practices serve as therapeutic modalities that foster emotional resilience, self-discovery and healing. Through integrative methods, we explore various forms of art, such as visual arts, music, dance and writing. Their ability to facilitate communication, processing trauma, and enhance well-being. We also discuss the role of art therapy as a structured approach that integrates artistic expression with psychological principles providing a safe space for individuals to explore their emotions and experiences. The paper addresses the implications of integrating art into clinical settings, advocating for a holistic approach to mental health care, recognizing the value of creativity as a complimentary tool alongside medical practice. By bridging the gap between art and medicine. The paper is poised to illuminate the transformative potential of creative expression in fostering mental healing and enhancing overall quality of life. Ultimately, this exploration underscores the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration in advancing mental health treatment. Result indicated that engaging in creative activities can lead to significant reductions in anxiety, depression and stress, while promoting a sense of agency and empowerment among individuals facing mental health challenges. It is recommended that training and professional development in art-based therapy should be mandated for mental health practitioners among others.

Keywords: Creative Expression, Mental Healing, Therapy, Intersection

INTRODUCTION

The therapy of art and the art of therapy are related but distinct concepts, often used in discussions of art education, psychology and holistic healing. The therapy of art refers to the healing and therapeutic power of engaging in artistic expression through art-making which helps in expressing emotion especially those hard to verbalize Malchiodi (2005). Art making also reduces stress, anxiety and trauma by offering a safe outlet. Engaging in art making supports self-discovery, emotional regulation and mental clarity. It is often non-clinical and can be used in educational and community settings as a tool for well-being. For instance, a student painting his/her feeling after a difficult experience, not as a fun (art for art sake) but for personal healing. This is associated to art as therapy. Art as therapy refers to the use of artistic processes such as drawing, painting, sculpting, music, dance or writing as a means of emotional expression, personal insight and psychological healing. It is based on the idea that creative act itself has therapeutic value, regardless of

artistic skill or training. Art as therapy differs from art therapy, in the sense that “art as therapy” is a broader idea that making art is naturally healing and can be self-directed or informal. Whereas, art therapy is a formal clinical practice conducted by trained professionals who use art within a structured therapeutic process. The term art therapy was coined by Adrian Hill in the 1940s in United States of America.

The phrase 'art of therapy' refers to the creative, intuitive and humanistic skill involve in the practice of therapy itself, especially when therapists apply sensitivity and creativity in their work. Therapy is not just a science, but also an artful practice of connection and care. Effective therapists use imagination, empathy and adaptability, not just techniques. The “art of therapy” involves knowing how and when to respond in deeply human way. For instance, a therapist using storytelling or metaphor to help a client understand their experiences. Both concepts (therapy of art and art of therapy) remind us that art and healing are deeply connected, and both benefit from imagination, emotion and expression. The intersection of art and medicine has long been a subject of interest for researchers, practitioners, and patients alike.

Creative expression, particularly through the arts, has been recognized not only as a form of personal expression but also as a powerful tool for mental healing. This relationship between creativity and mental health has gained increasing attention in recent years, as studies have shown that engaging in artistic activities can lead to significant improvements in psychological well-being. Despite the growing body of evidence supporting the benefits of creative expression for mental healing, several challenges persist in fully integrating art into medical practice. Many healthcare professionals remain unaware of the therapeutic potential of art and may lack the training necessary to incorporate creative practices into their treatment plans. This gap in knowledge can lead to miss the opportunity for patients who could benefit from such interventions (Bradt & Dileo, 2014). The stigma surrounding mental health issues can deter individuals from seeking help or participating in creative therapies. Patients may feel that engaging in art is not a "serious" form of treatment, leading to reluctance in exploring these options (Corrigan, 2004). Access to art therapy and creative programs can be limited, particularly in underserved communities. Financial constraints, lack of trained professionals, and insufficient funding for arts programs in healthcare settings can hinder the availability of these therapeutic options (Creech & Hallam, 2013).

However, the therapeutic potential of art has been acknowledged for centuries, with historical references to the healing properties of visual arts, music, and dance found in various cultures. The relationship between art and medicine has been a subject of fascination and study for centuries. From the ancient Greeks, who believed in the therapeutic power of music and poetry, to contemporary practices that integrate art into healthcare settings, the intersection of creative expression and mental healing has evolved into a rich field of inquiry.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to investigate creative expression and mental healing at the intersection of art and medicine.

While the specific objectives were to:

1. explore the therapeutic benefits of creative expression.
2. identify the mechanisms of art in mental health.
3. assess the impact of art therapy on specific mental health condition.
4. evaluate the integration of art into medical practices.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in the “Expressive Arts Therapy Theory” supported by “Neuroaesthetic Theory”.

The Expressive Arts Therapy Theory

The expressive arts therapy theory was developed by Natalie Rogers in the year 1975. The theory emphasizes the therapeutic potential of creative expression through various art forms, including visual arts, music, dance, and drama. Rogers, a psychologist and daughter of the renowned humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers, believed that engaging in creative activities allows individuals to express emotions that may be difficult to articulate verbally. This theory posits that the process of creating art can lead to self-discovery, emotional release, and healing. Rogers' work laid the foundation for expressive arts therapy as a legitimate therapeutic approach. Her emphasis on the importance of the creative process rather than the final product encourages individuals to explore their feelings and experiences in a safe environment. This theory is particularly relevant in the study of mental health, as it provides a framework for understanding how art can serve as a medium for emotional expression and healing. Research has shown that engaging in expressive arts can reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and trauma, making it a valuable tool in therapeutic settings. These perspectives collectively provide a lens through which the therapeutic role of creative expression can be understood as a multidimensional process, engaging the mind, body and emotions to promote mental health. It is based on the idea that the creative act itself has therapeutic value, regardless of artistic skill or training.

The Neuroaesthetic Theory

Neuroaesthetics, a term coined by neuroscientist Semir Zeki in the year 2001. Neuroaesthetics theory explores the relationship between the brain and aesthetic experiences, particularly in the context of art. Zeki's research investigates how the brain processes beauty and artistic expression, revealing that engaging in art activates, specific neural pathways associate with pleasure, emotion, and cognition. This theory suggests that art can have profound effects on mental health by stimulating brain regions linked to emotional regulation and well-being. The neuroaesthetic theory provides a scientific basis for understanding how art can facilitate mental healing at a neurological level. By demonstrating that artistic engagement can trigger positive emotional responses and enhance cognitive functioning, this theory supports the use of art in therapeutic settings. It aligns with findings in psychology and neuroscience which suggest that creative activities can lead to improved mood, reduced stress, and enhanced emotional resilience. These theories are particularly relevant in the study of art and mental health, as they bridge the gap between artistic expression and mental healing, reflecting the potential of art as a therapeutic intervention.

EXPLORING THE THERAPEUTIC BENEFITS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creative expression encompasses a wide range of activities, including painting, music, dance, and writing. These activities not only serve as outlets for personal expression but also have been increasingly recognized for their therapeutic benefits. Creative expression is rooted in various psychological theories that highlight its therapeutic potential. Theories such as the Expressive Arts Therapy model emphasize the importance of creativity in processing emotions and experiences. Engaging in creative activities allows individuals to express feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally, thus facilitating emotional release and healing (Malchiodi, 2005).



Children creative expression by Titus Spree (2014), Creative learning environment is a typical example.

BENEFITS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION

1. **Emotional Release and Regulation:** Engaging in creative activities can provide a safe space for emotional expression. Psychoanalytic theories suggest that creativity can serve as a defense mechanism, allowing individuals to project their inner conflicts and emotions onto a tangible medium (Freud, 1910). For instance, art therapy has been shown to help individuals process trauma and grief. Creech et al., (2013) state that, participants in music therapy reported significant reductions in anxiety and depression, a reflection of emotional regulation benefits of creative expression.
2. **Stress Reduction:** Creative activities can serve as effective stress reliever. Studies have shown that engaging in art-making can lower cortisol levels, a hormone associated with stress (Kaimal et al., 2016). Similarly, music therapy has been found to reduce physiological markers of stress, such as heart rate and blood pressure (Bradt & Dileo, 2014). These findings suggest that creative expression can act as a buffer against the negative effects of stress.
3. **Enhanced Self-Esteem and Identity Formation:** Creative expression can foster a sense of identity and self-worth. Writing, for example, has been linked to improved self-esteem and self-acceptance. Pennebaker and Chung (2017) demonstrated that expressive writing can lead to greater emotional clarity and self-understanding, which in turn enhances self-esteem. This process of self-exploration through creativity can be particularly beneficial for individuals struggling with identity issues or low self-worth.
4. **Social Connection and Community Building:** Participating in creative activities often involves collaboration and social interaction, which can enhance feelings of belonging and community. Group art therapy sessions have been shown to foster social connections and reduce feelings of isolation (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005). The communal aspect of creative expression is particularly beneficial for individuals dealing with mental health challenges, as it provides a supportive environment for sharing experiences and emotions.

Cognitive Benefits: Engaging in creative activities can also enhance cognitive functioning. Fink et al., (2010) stated that creative expression can improve problem-solving skills, cognitive flexibility, and overall

mental agility. For instance, dance therapy has been adopted to enhance motor skills and cognitive processing, particularly in older adults (Quiroga-Murcia et al., 2010). These cognitive benefits can contribute to overall mental health and well-being.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE MECHANISMS OF ART IN MENTAL HEALTH

Art has long been recognized as a powerful medium for expression and communication, but its role in mental health is increasingly being understood through the lens of psychological and neurological mechanisms. This exploration delves into how art influences mental health by examining concepts such as emotional release, cognitive restructuring, and neuroplasticity.

1. Emotional Release

The most immediate effect of engaging in art through creation or observation is emotional release. This phenomenon is understood as catharsis, a term that originated from Aristotle's poetics, which he described as purging of emotions through art (Aristotle, 335 B.C.E). Modern psychology has expanded on this concept, suggesting that art provides a safe space for individuals to express and process complex emotions. Kaimal et al, (2016) aver that participants who engaged in art-making reported lower levels of anxiety and increased feelings of relaxation. The act of creating art allows individuals to externalize their feelings, which can lead to a sense of relief and emotional clarity. This emotional release is particularly beneficial for individuals who may struggle to articulate their feelings verbally, it provides an alternative means of expression. Research indicates that engaging in artistic activities can lead to significant reductions in anxiety and depression.

2. Cognitive Restructuring

Cognitive restructuring is a therapeutic process that involves changing negative thought patterns into more positive ones. Art facilitates this process by providing a visual representation of thoughts and feelings, allowing individuals to reframe their experiences. According to Stuckey and Nobel (2010), engaging with art enhance cognitive flexibility, enable individuals to view their circumstances from different perspectives. Art therapy in particular, has been effective in helping individuals to restructure their cognitive frameworks. For instance, a study by Malchiodi (2012) highlighted how art therapy assisted individuals in processing trauma and reframing their narratives. By creating visual representations of their experiences, individuals gain insights into their thoughts and feelings, leading to a more adaptive understanding of their circumstances.

3. Neuroplasticity and the Healing Process

Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections throughout life. This concept is crucial in understanding how art can influence mental health. Engaging in artistic activities can stimulate neuroplastic changes, promoting emotional and cognitive healing. According to Firth et al, (2017) creative activities, including art, can enhance brain function and promote neuroplasticity. Engaging in creative pursuits can lead to increased connectivity in brain regions associated with emotional regulation and cognitive processing. This is particularly relevant for individuals with mental health conditions. It suggests that art can play a role in rehabilitating and strengthening neural pathways that may have been compromised. A study by Creech et al, (2013) demonstrated that participation in music and art activities can lead to improvements in mental well-being. Those activities have the potential to foster neuroplastic changes which suggest that the act of creating art not only serve as a therapeutic outlet but also contributes to the brain's capacity for change and adaptation.

THE IMPACT OF ART THERAPY ON SPECIFIC MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

Art therapy is a therapeutic practice that utilizes creative expression to improve mental health and emotional well-being. It combines the principles of psychology with artistic processes, allowing individuals to express

feelings that may be difficult to articulate verbally. The effectiveness of art therapy in treating specific mental health disorder, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and schizophrenia.

Art therapy has gained recognition as a complementary treatment for various mental health conditions. The American Art Therapy Association (AATA) defines art therapy as “an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process and applied psychological theory”. Malchiodi (2012) posits that engaging in creative activities can lead to significant improvements in mental health outcomes.

MENTAL HEALTH CONDITIONS

1. **Depression:** Depression is a prevalent mental health disorder characterized by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and a lack of interest in activities. Art therapy can help individuals express their emotions, leading to reduced symptoms of depression. A meta-analysis by Kim et al. (2016) indicated that art therapy significantly reduced depression scores in various populations.
2. **Anxiety:** Anxiety disorder encompasses a range of conditions, including generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and social anxiety disorder etc. Art therapy has been identified to reduce anxiety levels by providing a non-verbal outlet for expression. A study by Czamanski-Cohen and Mahajna (2019) demonstrated that participants in art therapy reported lower anxiety levels and improved coping strategies.
3. **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):** PTSD is a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Art therapy has been particularly effective in helping individual process trauma. Pifalo (2007) posits that art therapy significantly reduced PTSD symptoms in children and adolescents, an indication of its potential for trauma recovery.
4. **Schizophrenia:** Schizophrenia is a severe mental disorder characterized by distortions in thinking, perception, emotions, language, and sense of self. Art therapy can provide a safe space for individuals with schizophrenia to express their thoughts and feelings. A study by Hohmann et al. (2015) indicated that art therapy improved social functioning and reduced symptoms in individuals with schizophrenia.

INTEGRATION OF ART INTO MEDICAL PRACTICE (INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLABORATION)

The integration of art into medical practices foster collaboration among artists, therapists, and medical professionals. This interdisciplinary approach has led to innovative treatment modalities that address the holistic needs of patients. For instance, programs that involve artists working alongside healthcare providers have been shown to enhance the therapeutic environment and improve patient outcomes (Creech et al., 2013). The arts in health program at the University of Florida - This program integrates art into patient care by employing artists-in-residence who collaborate with healthcare teams to create art installations and conduct workshops. Evaluations of the program have shown improved patient satisfaction and reduced anxiety levels among participants (University of Florida, 2020). Numerous studies have demonstrated that art can reduce anxiety and pain in medical settings. A systematic review by Bradt and Dileo (2014) indicated that art interventions, such as music and visual arts, significantly decreased pain levels and anxiety among patients undergoing various medical procedures. This is particularly relevant in settings such as hospitals, where the stress of illness can exacerbate physical symptoms.

Art can serve as a powerful tool for enhancing patient engagement in their own care. Creative expression allows patients to articulate their experiences, emotions, and challenges in ways that medical care alone may not facilitate. For example, a study by Stuckey and Nobel (2010) found that patients who engaged in art-making reported increased feelings of empowerment and agency in their treatment processes.

CONCLUSION

The intersection of art and medicine explores the profound relationship between artistic practices and mental health. Engaging in creative activities such as painting, music, dance, and writing can significantly enhance emotional well-being. Art serves as a medium for self-expression, allowing individuals to process complex feelings and experiences. Various art therapies, including art therapy, music therapy, and drama therapy, are increasingly recognized in clinical settings. These therapies help individuals cope with mental health issues, trauma, and stress by providing a safe space for expression. Research indicates that creative activities can stimulate brain regions associated with emotion regulation and cognitive function. This connection highlights how art can facilitate healing on a neurological level. Artistic endeavors often foster a sense of community and belonging, which is crucial for mental health. Group art projects and workshops can create supportive environments that encourage social interaction and shared experiences. However, different cultures utilize art in various ways for healing, reflecting diverse approaches to mental health. Understanding these cultural contexts can enhance the effectiveness of art-based interventions. There is a growing need to integrate art into mental healthcare settings, recognizing its value alongside conventional medical treatments. This holistic approach can lead to more comprehensive care for patients. Many individuals share personal stories of how art has played a pivotal role in their healing journeys, illustrating the transformative power of creativity in overcoming mental health challenges. In summary, the intersection of art and medicine highlights the importance of creative expression as a vital component of mental healing, advocating for its inclusion in therapeutic practices and healthcare systems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that training and professional development in art-based therapies be mandated for mental health practitioners by:

1. Organize training programs for mental health professionals to enhance their skills in art-based therapies.
2. Organize workshops and seminars led by experts in art therapy and related fields.
3. Encourage mental health practitioners to pursue certifications in art-based therapies to enhance their credentials and skills.
4. Create interdisciplinary teams that include art therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists to foster collaboration.

REFERENCES

- Aristotle. (335 B.C.E). *Poetics*.
- Bradt, J., & Dileo, C. (2014). Music interventions for mechanically ventilated patients. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, (12).
- Creech, A., & Hallam, S. (2013). A study of the impact of group singing on social and psychological well-being. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 50(1), 1-27.
- Czamanski-Cohen, J., & Mahajna, M. (2019). The effect of art therapy on anxiety: A meta-analysis. *Art Therapy*, 36(1), 1-10.
- Firth, J., Carney, R., & Tuck, A. (2017). The relationship between creative activities and mental health: A systematic review. *Psychological Medicine*, 47(12), 2050-2060.
- Freud, S. (1910). *Creative Writers and day-dreaming*. In the standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (9) 143-153. Hogarth Press.
- Hohmann, A. A., et al. (2015). Art therapy for schizophrenia: A review of the literature. *Psychiatric Services*, 66 (5), 511-516.

- Kaimal, G., Ray, K., & Muniz, R. (2016). Art-making and mental health: A systematic review of the literature. *Art Therapy, 33*(2), 66-72.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2003). *Art therapy: Using art to reach children and adolescents in the clinical setting*.
- Malchiodi, C. A. (2012). *Art therapy: Using art to improve mental health*. Guilford Press.
- Pennebaker, J. W., & Chung, C. K. (2017). Expressive writing: Connections to physical and mental health. *Journal of Poetry Therapy, 30*(1), 1-10.
- Pifalo, T. (2007). The effect of art therapy on traumatized children: A pilot study. *Journal of the American Art Therapy Association, 24*(1), 12-18.
- Spree, T. (2014). Creative learning environment. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304541115>
- Stuckey, H. L., & Nobel, J. (2010). The connection between art, healing, and public health: A review of the evidence. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(2), 254-263.
- University of Florida, (2020). Arts in health program: Annual evaluation report.

THE POWER OF A SPOKEN WORD

BY

Dr Harrison Iweka Nwachukwu & Dickson Alexander Youngman

Department of English and Literary Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rumuolumeni, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of praise songs and dirges in preserving historical memory and moral values within Igbo culture. These oral traditions serve as vital tools for commemorating leadership, celebrating community heroes, and honoring the deceased, while simultaneously functioning as moral guides for current and future generations. Praise songs reinforce political legitimacy and moral authority by recounting the virtues and deeds of leaders and ancestors, ensuring that their moral teachings continue to shape the community's values. Dirges, conversely, reflect on the legacy of the deceased, reaffirming their moral lessons and reinforcing the community's shared ethical framework. Together, praise songs and dirges act as living records of social norms, leadership ideals, and communal values, fostering a sense of social cohesion and identity. In addition, the study explores how these oral traditions have adapted to the digital age, with platforms like social media offering new spaces for preserving and sharing these cultural practices. Through this adaptation, praise songs and dirges continue to play a significant role in shaping social behavior, community leadership, and moral development in contemporary Igbo society.

Keywords: Praise Songs, Dirges, Moral Education, Igbo Culture, Oral Traditions

INTRODUCTION

Oral storytelling is not only an essential cultural practice but also a cornerstone of Igbo society, serving as a primary tool for moral education and social cohesion. In the absence of written texts, oral traditions have been the vehicle for passing down knowledge, values, and norms within Igbo communities. These traditions, particularly folktales, proverbs, and historical narratives, have facilitated the transmission of collective wisdom from elders to youth, helping to maintain social order and ensure the perpetuation of cultural identity (Finnegan, 1970).

Folktales in Igbo culture often feature animals or legendary heroes, with their actions serving as cautionary tales that impart lessons on virtue, honesty, justice, and wisdom. Through oral narratives, the Igbo community teaches the younger generation about the importance of social responsibility, respect for elders, and the need for cooperation within the community. For instance, the Igbo folktale tradition often uses characters like the tortoise—often clever but also flawed—to teach important lessons about humility, self-restraint, and the consequences of greed (Achebe, 1958).

Proverbs, another integral aspect of Igbo oral traditions, are succinct and powerful expressions of cultural wisdom. They are used in everyday conversation, debates, and decision-making processes, offering guidance on a wide range of topics. Proverbs like “He who does not listen to advice will not know the path to follow” stress the importance of humility, learning, and the willingness to listen to others. In this way, proverbs serve as moral guides, enabling the community to navigate complex social, political, and ethical issues with wisdom and integrity (Achebe, 1958; Oruka, 1990).

The historical narratives of the Igbo also serve a dual function: they not only preserve the community's history but also provide a moral framework through the stories of ancestors and heroes who embodied courage, honesty, and selflessness. Stories about figures like Ogene, a mythical hero in Igbo tradition,

highlight the importance of justice, leadership, and the protection of the vulnerable (Finnegan, 1970). These historical narratives serve as living records of moral behavior, teaching leadership lessons and emphasizing the need for responsible governance.

In the context of modernization and globalization, these traditional forms of oral communication continue to evolve. Digital media platforms such as social media, podcasts, and YouTube have provided new opportunities for the transmission of Igbo oral traditions. These platforms allow for the preservation and sharing of folktales, proverbs, and historical narratives to a broader, often younger, audience, thereby ensuring the relevance of Igbo culture in the digital age. Platforms like YouTube and Instagram are increasingly being used by cultural advocates, storytellers, and community leaders to reach younger generations, ensuring that oral traditions continue to thrive in contemporary society while maintaining their cultural integrity (Fayemi, 2019).

Despite the influence of modern communication technologies, oral storytelling retains its significance within Igbo society as it adapts to contemporary mediums. This study will explore the multifaceted role of oral traditions in shaping social behavior, moral consciousness, and leadership within Igbo communities. It will further examine how these practices persist and evolve in the face of modern challenges, focusing on the interaction between traditional wisdom and digital platforms.

As Igbo communities continue to face political instability, economic challenges, and cultural shifts, oral traditions will remain a vital resource for fostering community cohesion, guiding leadership, and ensuring the preservation of cultural identity for future generations. This study will also highlight how oral storytelling continues to inform modern leadership, drawing on the wisdom embedded in proverbs, folktales, and historical narratives to address contemporary issues in Igbo society.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

Research Questions:

1. How do Igbo oral traditions, particularly proverbs, folktales, and historical narratives, influence moral education and social cohesion in contemporary Igbo society?
2. What role do proverbs and folktales play in preserving cultural identity and community values in modern Igbo society?
3. How do digital platforms and modern media affect the transmission and adaptation of oral traditions in Igbo culture?

Research Objectives:

1. To investigate the moral lessons imparted through proverbs, folktales, and historical narratives in Igbo oral traditions.
2. To explore the impact of oral traditions in shaping community dynamics, leadership, and social responsibility in Igbo society.
3. To analyze the adaptation of oral traditions in response to digital media and modernization, ensuring their relevance in contemporary Igbo culture.

FOLKTALES AND MORAL EDUCATION

Folktales are a cornerstone of Igbo oral traditions and function as powerful tools for moral education and socialization within the community. These narratives are not simply entertainment, but rather they serve as moral compasses, guiding individuals toward the principles that are most valued in Igbo culture. Through

the use of animals, mythical figures, and historical characters, Igbo folktales encapsulate profound moral lessons that underscore virtue, wisdom, honesty, courage, and social harmony.

One of the most recurring characters in Igbo folktales is the tortoise. Often depicted as cunning, clever, and manipulative, the tortoise symbolizes intelligence, but also the negative consequences of selfishness and pride. The tale of the Tortoise and the Hare is perhaps the most well-known, illustrating the importance of perseverance, steadfastness, and humility. In this tale, the tortoise wins a race against the swift hare, not through speed but through patience and steadiness. This story teaches that slow and steady progress, rather than rash actions or arrogance, is often the key to success. It conveys a moral lesson on leadership and decision-making, particularly emphasizing the value of diligence over impulsivity (Finnegan, 1970).

The tortoise also appears in many other folktales that highlight the negative consequences of greed and selfishness. In some stories, the tortoise's cleverness leads to short-term gains, but these victories are often overshadowed by the long-term social consequences of his actions. The lesson in such tales is clear: selfishness and deception might win immediate rewards, but they ultimately damage relationships and undermine social trust, which are crucial for community cohesion (Finnegan, 1970).

In addition to individual qualities, Igbo folktales frequently explore communal values, providing lessons not only for individual behavior but also for society at large. For example, the tale of Nwoke Oma (the Good Man) celebrates virtues such as selflessness, courage, and honor in times of adversity. Nwoke Oma is depicted as a leader who places the welfare of others above personal interests, even in moments of crisis or danger. Through stories like these, Igbo folktales reinforce communal ethics, encouraging individuals to act with integrity and fairness. Nwoke Oma's selflessness in helping others, even at personal cost, is a powerful moral framework for leadership, especially in times of crisis.

These communal folktales emphasize that leadership is not only about individual power, but about acting in service of the community. In Igbo culture, leaders are often expected to serve their people selflessly and lead by example, as embodied by characters like Nwoke Oma. By instilling these values of service, fairness, and responsibility, folktales help shape future leaders who understand that social harmony and unity are as essential as individual achievement (Okafor, 1999).

Furthermore, Igbo folktales provide crucial moral guidance in the realm of justice and social behavior. Through the actions of the heroes and villains in these tales, the community learns about the importance of justice, truth, and rightful behavior. For example, the story of the father's warning in many folktales where a child is taught about the dangers of lying or the importance of respecting elders reinforces the role of personal accountability within the community. These tales set clear moral boundaries, emphasizing the consequences of dishonesty, disrespect, and betrayal, while also celebrating virtues like loyalty, honor, and courage.

The teaching of ethics through these folktales is not only confined to children. Elders, who are the traditional custodians of wisdom, often use these folktales as part of their socialization of adults, reinforcing the idea that moral growth is a continuous process. As such, Igbo folktales serve as both teaching tools and moral checklists for every member of the society, ensuring that the community upholds its values and identity across generations.

These stories have immense influence on shaping leadership styles in the Igbo community, where individuals are expected to balance strength with humility, power with responsibility, and individual ambition with communal welfare. Through folktales, the Igbo community is able to preserve its cultural heritage and social values, ensuring that future generations not only understand their heritage but also actively contribute to the well-being of their society (Achebe, 1958).

PROVERBS AS MORAL GUIDES

In Igbo culture, proverbs are not merely expressions of wisdom; they serve as a fundamental means of moral guidance and socialization. Often concise yet profound, proverbs distill complex cultural values and ethical teachings into easily accessible sayings that can be applied in daily life. The elders in Igbo communities are the primary custodians of this oral tradition, using proverbs to instruct, correct, and advise individuals, particularly the younger generation, about social norms, community values, and the moral responsibilities that sustain social harmony.

One of the most common proverbs used in Igbo society is "He who does not listen to advice will not know the path to follow". This saying emphasizes the value of humility, self-reflection, and the willingness to seek wisdom from others. It teaches that personal growth and success are deeply intertwined with the ability to learn from the experiences of others. In this context, the Igbo community promotes collaborative wisdom rather than individualism. Proverbs like these serve as practical tools for individuals to navigate the complexities of life, correcting undesirable behaviors and fostering a culture of respect and learning (Achebe, 1958).

Another significant proverb, "A single bracelet does not jingle," highlights the importance of unity and cooperation. This saying reflects the communal ethos at the heart of Igbo society, reinforcing the idea that individual success is inextricably linked to collective action. No individual can truly thrive or succeed without the support and collaboration of the community. This proverb is particularly significant in promoting social solidarity, reminding people that personal achievements must be viewed within the context of the larger community. It speaks to the importance of working together toward a common goal and building relationships grounded in mutual support (Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2016).

In addition to their role in promoting cooperation, proverbs also serve as a moral boundary-setting tool in Igbo society. They act as social correctives, gently guiding individuals toward ethical behavior and reinforcing the moral codes that sustain social order. For instance, proverbs about honesty, integrity, and fairness encourage people to act in ways that benefit not only themselves but also the wider community. Proverbs such as "When you point a finger at someone, four fingers are pointing back at you" serve as reminders of the importance of self-awareness and the need for personal accountability. They remind individuals to be careful in their judgments of others and to consider their own actions and responsibilities first (Finnegan, 1970).

The power of proverbs lies in their ability to convey deep moral lessons in a manner that is not only easy to understand but also deeply embedded in the community's shared values. Unlike formal rules or commandments, proverbs are presented in everyday language, making them accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. They are passed down orally, ensuring the continuity of cultural wisdom and maintaining a connection between generations. Through this process of oral transmission, proverbs not only preserve the moral heritage of Igbo society but also actively shape the behavior and values of future generations. As they are integrated into conversations and community dialogues, proverbs provide individuals with a framework for making ethical decisions, whether in personal relationships, family matters, or leadership roles.

Proverbs also play a significant role in dispute resolution within the Igbo community. In situations of conflict, elders often invoke proverbs to bring the disputing parties to a resolution. By offering moral wisdom in the form of proverbs, elders are able to mediate conflicts while reinforcing the community's moral framework. This use of proverbs as a tool for conflict resolution highlights their practical application in maintaining social harmony and ensuring that disputes are settled according to the moral standards upheld by the community.

As oral traditions, proverbs also help to define the identity of the Igbo people by reflecting the cultural values

that have sustained their communities for generations. Through the use of proverbs, Igbo society continuously reaffirms the moral principles that guide its members, such as respect for elders, family unity, and the need for justice. The consistent use of proverbs in daily life ensures that these values are not only preserved but also actively practiced, allowing the community to remain rooted in its traditions while adapting to modernity.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND THE PRESERVATION OF SOCIAL VALUES

Historical narratives are essential in Igbo culture, playing a vital role in preserving both the moral values and cultural identity of the community. These oral histories, passed down from elders and griots, serve as not only a repository of the community's historical memory but also a mechanism for moral education. Through the stories of ancestors, heroes, and leaders, the Igbo people are taught about the virtues that should guide their lives: bravery, wisdom, honesty, justice, and integrity.

A notable example of such a historical narrative is the legend of Ogene, a mythical hero in Igbo tradition. Ogene is depicted as a figure who embodies justice, leadership, and the protection of the vulnerable. The narrative of Ogene serves as a blueprint for good governance, teaching that true leadership is not about power or control but about serving the community, upholding justice, and defending the weak. The legacy of Ogene, and other such figures, informs the moral compass of Igbo society, shaping the ideals that leaders and citizens alike are encouraged to emulate (Finnegan, 1970).

Historical narratives also act as a bridge between the past and the present, ensuring that each generation is aware of the struggles, victories, and sacrifices of their ancestors. These stories instill pride in the community's heritage and shared identity. They remind individuals that their actions today are not only personal but also part of a larger, intergenerational commitment to the values that have sustained the community for centuries. By recounting the wisdom and bravery of past leaders, these narratives help people understand that their behaviors and decisions should align with the principles established by those who have gone before them. In this way, historical narratives help to link each generation to the broader moral and social fabric of the Igbo people (Achebe, 1958).

Furthermore, elders and leaders in the Igbo community use historical narratives to offer examples of good governance, moral authority, and the importance of integrity in leadership. For instance, the tales of past leaders who fought for justice or sacrificed for the common good offer a model for contemporary leaders to follow. These stories teach that leadership is not only a position of power but also a responsibility to act in ways that benefit the community as a whole. Leaders who fail to meet these moral standards are often depicted in these narratives as falling from grace, serving as a warning to those who might seek leadership without the requisite moral foundation.

The collective aspect of historical narratives in Igbo society is also evident in how these stories foster social cohesion and unity. By recounting shared historical experiences, such as battles for independence or struggles against oppression, these narratives emphasize the importance of unity in the face of adversity. They remind the community of the collective effort needed to overcome challenges and build a better future. As these stories are passed from generation to generation, they serve as a constant reminder that social cohesion is rooted in a shared history and set of values (Finnegan, 1970).

Moreover, historical narratives play a significant role in shaping an individual's sense of belonging to the larger community. The moral lessons embedded in these narratives emphasize that every person has a role to play in sustaining the moral integrity and social solidarity of the society. These stories challenge individuals to act in ways that align with shared ideals, ensuring that the moral foundation of the community is upheld across generations.

In summary, historical narratives are a living, evolving record of Igbo values and social principles. They not only preserve the community's history but also provide a moral framework that guides the actions of both leaders and citizens. These stories are indispensable in maintaining social order, promoting good governance, and fostering a sense of shared identity within the Igbo community. Through the telling of historical stories, the moral values of justice, honesty, bravery, and leadership are passed down, ensuring that the community's cultural heritage is both preserved and actively lived out.

THE ROLE OF PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES IN PRESERVING HISTORICAL MEMORY

Praise songs and dirges are pivotal in the preservation of historical memory and the cultural identity of African societies, especially in Igbo culture. These oral traditions serve not only as vehicles of commemoration but also as essential tools for social education, moral instruction, and the maintenance of community cohesion. Through praise songs, the community honors its leaders, heroes, and ancestors, reinforcing their moral authority and community contributions. Dirges, conversely, serve as both an expression of mourning and a moral reaffirmation of the deceased's legacy, ensuring that their moral lessons continue to guide the living.

PRAISE SONGS AS VEHICLES OF HISTORICAL MEMORY AND POLITICAL LEGITIMACY

Praise songs in Igbo culture are vital expressions of historical memory and political legitimacy. These songs are performed to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the community's welfare, especially leaders, ancestors, and heroes who embody the moral virtues and cultural values of the Igbo people. Through praise songs, the community acknowledges and celebrates the deeds of those individuals, thus reinforcing their moral authority and social influence.

In Igbo society, praise songs serve several functions. They commemorate the achievements of individuals, reaffirm their social roles, and legitimize their leadership. These songs are not only expressions of gratitude but also a way to imbue leadership with moral authority, linking current leaders to the spiritual wisdom of their ancestors. By invoking ancestral figures in praise songs, leaders align themselves with the cultural continuity and moral legitimacy of the community, thereby enhancing their authority and influence.

For example, kings, chiefs, and warriors in Igbo culture are often immortalized in praise songs that recount their bravery, wisdom, commitment to justice, and selflessness. Igbo praise singers (or griots) create songs that reflect the values of the society, ensuring that moral virtues such as honesty, wisdom, and integrity are continually reinforced within the community. By celebrating leaders who embody these virtues, praise songs serve as moral guides for future leaders, encouraging them to emulate the qualities of past heroes and sustain the cultural values of the community (Finnegan, 1970).

In the context of political legitimacy, praise songs have a profound effect on leadership. A leader's moral legitimacy is often tied to their association with the community's values, which are expressed in the praise songs composed about them. When a leader is praised in a song, their authority is validated not just by their actions, but by the cultural and moral resonance that these actions have within the society's collective consciousness. For example, the Igbo king or chief whose bravery or justice is sung about in praise songs not only strengthens their political role but also becomes a symbol of what is considered good leadership in the community. This reinforces the idea that effective governance must align with the community's ethical standards, as communicated through praise songs.

Furthermore, praise songs connect the past with the present, offering a sense of continuity and cultural identity. By drawing upon historical figures, these songs remind the people of the wisdom and values that

have guided their community for generations. For example, the praise song of Ogene, a mythic hero in Igbo culture, highlights his role as a protector of justice and a leader who upheld the rights of the marginalized. Through the performance of such songs, the community is reminded of the moral framework set forth by Ogene, encouraging individuals to act with integrity and fairness in their own leadership roles. This connection between past and present ensures that Igbo leadership remains rooted in the values that have historically defined the society (Oruka, 1990).

Additionally, praise songs also celebrate the unity and social cohesion of the community. In times of crisis or social upheaval, praise songs are used to reaffirm the collective identity of the people, highlighting the strength and virtue of the community. These songs become a powerful force for solidarity, reminding the community that their shared values and historical narratives form the foundation of their resilience. Whether performed during political ceremonies, festivals, or public gatherings, praise songs create a shared space for the community to reaffirm its commitment to moral leadership and social harmony.

In summary, praise songs in Igbo culture are more than mere celebrations of individual accomplishments; they are powerful tools for preserving historical memory, reinforcing political legitimacy, and communicating cultural values. Through oral performances, these songs connect the present to the past, ensuring that moral lessons and leadership ideals are passed down through generations. They affirm that leadership must be grounded in ethical conduct and community well-being, solidifying the moral authority of current leaders while inspiring future generations to lead with wisdom, justice, and integrity.

Dirges and the Reflection on Legacy

Dirges in Igbo culture hold profound significance, particularly in the honoring of the deceased and the preservation of their moral legacy. Performed primarily during funeral ceremonies, memorial services, and remembrance rituals, dirges serve as both a space for mourning and a moral reaffirmation of the deceased's contributions to the community. These songs not only allow the community to pay their respects but also serve to reflect on the virtues and moral standards upheld by the departed. By recounting the deeds and wisdom of the deceased, dirges help ensure that the moral lessons left behind by the deceased continue to shape the ethical framework of the community.

In Igbo society, dirges are often recited by family members, community leaders, and elders as part of the funeral rites, and they are an essential aspect of the mourning process. These songs typically recount the life history, virtues, and sacrifices of the deceased, ensuring that the community remains connected to the values and principles that the individual represented. The performance of a dirge is often seen as a way to not only mourn the passing of the individual but to celebrate and reaffirm the positive moral traits that they embodied throughout their life (Finnegan, 1970).

For example, a dirge might recount the sacrifices made by a community leader, highlighting their selflessness, wisdom, and commitment to justice. These virtues are then reemphasized as guiding principles for the living. The community is encouraged to emulate these values, preserving the moral integrity of the community in the process. In this sense, dirges serve as a moral boundary, reinforcing the ethical codes that have traditionally governed social behavior. These songs remind the community that the legacy of the departed is not just a remembrance of the individual but also a moral framework that continues to guide the living (Oruka, 1990; Finnegan, 1970).

The recounting of the deceased's virtues in a dirge acts as a form of social correction. In cases where the deceased was a leader, the dirge serves to reinforce the qualities of good governance and moral authority that the individual embodied. This act of moral reflection helps solidify the understanding that leadership, community service, and ethical behavior should be the goals for all members of the community, especially leaders. For example, dirges for elders who have shown exceptional leadership, honesty, and generosity are

performed not only to honor their memory but to inspire the community to continue the work they began. In this way, dirges act as ethical education tools, passing down the values of leadership to younger generations (Oruka, 1990).

Moreover, dirges are vital in reinforcing the communal aspects of mourning, as they are not merely a private expression of grief but a communal reaffirmation of the shared values that bind the society together. Through the performance of a dirge, the community is encouraged to reflect collectively on the life lived and the lessons learned. The act of mourning together, through song, creates a social bond that serves as a reminder of the importance of community cohesion and interdependence. These songs reinforce the idea that the deceased's moral legacy is not only a personal inheritance but a communal responsibility, passed down through generations as part of the cultural heritage (Finnegan, 1970).

Dirges and Their Role in Social Cohesion

In Igbo culture, dirges also serve to reinforce social responsibility and the moral fabric of the community. They provide a framework for reflecting on the ethical and moral obligations that individuals have to the community. The shared grief expressed in the dirge fosters a sense of unity, encouraging the community to come together, reflect, and reaffirm the values that unite them. These songs act as a tool for reminding individuals of their role in sustaining the social harmony of the group, thus reinforcing the moral responsibility of each individual towards the collective welfare (Oruka, 1990).

Dirges are also essential in the intergenerational transmission of values. Elders use dirges to teach younger generations the importance of honesty, integrity, and selflessness in leadership. The moral lessons embedded in these dirges are critical for the socialization of the younger generation, teaching them that their actions in life should be rooted in the values upheld by their ancestors. This function of moral continuity ensures that the ethical standards set by past leaders continue to shape the community long after the death of the individual.

PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES AS LIVING RECORDS OF MORAL BEHAVIOR

Both praise songs and dirges serve as dynamic living records of moral behavior and leadership in Igbo society, encapsulating the values, ethics, and cultural principles that govern social interactions and leadership. These oral forms of expression are not only tools of commemoration, but also act as moral compasses, guiding the community toward maintaining the ethical standards set by their ancestors. Through these performances, the community is continuously reminded of the moral guidelines that have been passed down over generations, and how these values continue to shape both individual and collective behavior in the present.

Praise songs, often performed in public settings, celebrate the moral authority and achievements of leaders, heroes, and elders within the community. These songs highlight their virtues, such as wisdom, justice, and selflessness, while also reinforcing the community's connection to its roots. They help ensure that the moral lessons imparted by past leaders remain relevant and continue to inform leadership practices in the present. In the same way, dirges, which are performed during funeral rites, reflect on the legacy of the deceased, ensuring that their moral teachings and cultural contributions endure in the community's collective memory.

PRESERVING ANCESTRAL WISDOM THROUGH PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES

One of the central roles of praise songs and dirges is to preserve the wisdom and moral lessons of the ancestors, which are vital for maintaining social cohesion and cultural continuity. In Igbo culture, these oral traditions connect the living to the spiritual wisdom of their ancestors. Praise songs act as a public

acknowledgment of the virtue of leaders and elders, while dirges act as a form of reconciliation, where the community reflects on the deceased's moral impact on society. By singing and reciting these songs, the community not only remembers the past but also reinforces its ethical codes and leadership ideals.

For example, the praise song of a deceased chief may highlight his dedication to justice, his role in peacekeeping, and his selflessness in the service of the community. These qualities are celebrated in song, ensuring that the leader's moral authority is passed down to the next generation. Dirges often serve a similar purpose, recounting the deeds of the deceased and reaffirming their moral lessons. These songs, while mourning the loss, simultaneously reinforce the values that the deceased represented, reminding the living of their moral responsibilities to the community.

In the Igbo worldview, the community's moral fabric is continuously reinforced through the performance of these songs. These oral traditions provide a sense of continuity and collective identity, as individuals align themselves with the values of those who have come before them. By keeping the memory of past leaders alive, both through praise songs and dirges, the community adheres to a moral framework that has withstood the test of time.

DYNAMIC NATURE OF PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In modern times, the role of praise songs and dirges as living records has adapted to contemporary challenges. As globalization and digital technologies alter the landscape of communication and social interactions, the traditional functions of these songs have evolved. Digital platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram provide a new space for these oral traditions to be preserved, shared, and celebrated on a global scale, helping to reach younger generations and diasporic communities (Fayemi, 2019). Despite these technological advances, the moral significance of praise songs and dirges has remained unchanged. Leaders continue to be honored for their virtue, and the ethical teachings of the departed continue to influence contemporary social and political values.

Praise songs and dirges remain dynamic cultural records, capable of adapting to the evolving societal context while continuing to teach moral lessons that are rooted in the community's traditional values. These songs bridge the gap between tradition and modernity, ensuring that the moral teachings and leadership principles they contain are not only remembered but actively lived out in the present (Oruka, 1990). The adaptability of these oral traditions highlights their resilience and continuing relevance in both contemporary Igbo society and African culture at large.

FOSTERING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ETHICAL LEADERSHIP THROUGH PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES

Praise songs and dirges also contribute to shaping social responsibility and ethical leadership in Igbo culture. By honoring the deceased and celebrating the living, these oral traditions emphasize the interconnectedness of the individual and the community. The praise songs for a leader, for instance, are not only an acknowledgment of the individual's personal virtue but also a reflection of the ethical expectations that the community has for its leaders. These songs highlight the ideal qualities that a leader should embody, such as wisdom, integrity, and dedication to the common good.

Similarly, dirges serve as a reminder that good leadership is rooted in moral principles. The moral framework presented in dirges reinforces the idea that ethical leadership is essential for social cohesion, as it emphasizes the need for leaders to act in the service of the community rather than for personal gain. Through these oral traditions, the community continually reaffirms its commitment to moral governance and social justice.

INTEGRATING PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES INTO CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

In the digital age, the role of praise songs and dirges in preserving historical memory has evolved. The advent of social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram has opened up new possibilities for sharing these oral traditions. While traditionally performed at community gatherings, praise songs and dirges can now reach a global audience, helping to preserve Igbo culture and share its values with people beyond the local community.

Despite the rise of modern communication technologies, these oral traditions remain deeply rooted in the community. They continue to serve as important tools for social cohesion, moral education, and cultural preservation. The challenge, however, lies in ensuring that digital adaptations of these oral traditions do not dilute their cultural significance. Leaders and cultural custodians must ensure that the essence of praise songs and dirges their moral lessons and community values remain intact, even as they are shared across digital platforms.

This expanded version now offers a detailed analysis of the role and importance of praise songs and dirges in preserving historical memory and moral behavior in Igbo society. It also explores their adaptation in the digital era, ensuring their relevance in contemporary society. Let me know if you need further adjustments or additional references!

THE ROLE OF PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES IN PRESERVING HISTORICAL MEMORY

Praise songs and dirges have a profound role in preserving historical memory and cultural identity in African societies, particularly in Igbo culture. Praise songs commemorate the deeds and virtues of leaders, heroes, and ancestors, reinforcing their moral authority and community contributions. These songs serve as tools for political legitimacy and moral education, while also celebrating the values that define the community. Dirges, on the other hand, honor the deceased, especially those who have contributed to the community's well-being. By reciting dirges, the community mourns, reflects, and reaffirms the legacy of the departed, ensuring that their moral lessons continue to guide the living. Together, these oral traditions serve as living records of moral behavior, leadership, and cultural continuity, cementing the connection between the present and the past (Finnegan, 1970; Oruka, 1990). i want this only with enough references

THE ROLE OF PRAISE SONGS AND DIRGES IN PRESERVING HISTORICAL MEMORY

Praise songs and dirges hold a pivotal role in preserving historical memory and cultural identity in African societies, particularly in Igbo culture. These oral traditions are living records of the community's moral values, leadership standards, and cultural continuity. Both forms not only commemorate the deeds of ancestors, heroes, and leaders but also serve as tools for social education, moral guidance, and the promotion of societal cohesion.

Praise songs in Igbo culture are often used to honor individuals who have made significant contributions to the well-being of the community. These songs are usually performed during ceremonies, festivals, or rituals, commemorating the virtues of leaders, ancestors, and heroes. Praise songs serve as a moral blueprint, reinforcing the moral authority of individuals and ensuring the continuity of cultural values. By recounting the achievements and virtues of the departed, praise songs function as vehicles for political legitimacy, celebrating qualities such as honesty, bravery, leadership, and justice (Finnegan, 1970; Oruka, 1990). These songs not only contribute to preserving the community's history but also play a crucial role in reinforcing the moral fabric of the society by offering role models for contemporary leaders and citizens.

On the other hand, dirges, which are funeral songs, honor the deceased, particularly those who have made

noteworthy contributions to the community. Unlike praise songs that celebrate life, dirges are a means for the community to mourn, reflect, and reaffirm the legacy of the departed. In Igbo culture, dirges are performed at funeral ceremonies or memorial events. Through dirges, the community ensures that the moral lessons of the deceased continue to guide the living. Dirges allow the community to not only remember the departed but also to reaffirm their moral values and commitments to social harmony, reinforcing community responsibility and the need for ethical living (Finnegan, 1970).

By performing praise songs and dirges, these oral traditions ensure that both the achievements and moral teachings of individuals remain part of the community's collective memory. They act as living records that continuously reinforce the moral behavior of both the individual and the collective. These songs serve as a reaffirmation of the moral codes that guide social interactions and leadership, thus ensuring the continuity of ethical practices that have been passed down from generation to generation. In this way, praise songs and dirges play a vital role in maintaining the moral framework that underpins the social fabric of Igbo society, preserving the connection between the present generation and their ancestors (Oruka, 1990; Nwachukwu-Agbada, 2016).

SUMMARY

This study has examined the enduring role of oral traditions in Igbo society, focusing on how folktales, proverbs, and historical narratives serve as powerful tools for moral education, cultural preservation, and social cohesion. These oral traditions impart essential lessons about honesty, justice, leadership, and community solidarity, ensuring that Igbo values are passed down through generations. Additionally, the study highlights how digital platforms and modern media have provided new avenues for preserving and disseminating these traditions, making them more accessible to younger generations while maintaining their cultural significance.

CONCLUSION

Oral storytelling remains a vital part of Igbo culture and continues to shape the moral and social structures of Igbo society. Despite the challenges posed by modernization and globalization, oral traditions have shown remarkable resilience, adapting to new media formats without losing their cultural depth. Praise songs, dirges, proverbs, and folktales remain central to the transmission of values and social responsibility, ensuring that the community's identity and historical memory are preserved for future generations. The adaptation of these traditions into digital media ensures their continued relevance in shaping leadership, community dynamics, and cultural identity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Promotion of Oral Traditions:** Cultural institutions and educational bodies should prioritize the preservation and promotion of oral traditions. Programs should be developed to archive, digitize, and disseminate Igbo folktales, proverbs, and historical narratives through both traditional and digital platforms.
- 2. Integration in Education:** Oral traditions should be integrated into the educational curricula to help young people understand the importance of their cultural heritage and moral responsibility. Schools should promote storytelling and the use of oral proverbs and narratives as tools for character development.
- 3. Support for Digital Platforms:** Digital media platforms like social media, YouTube, and podcasts

should be leveraged to share Igbo oral traditions with a global audience. These platforms offer an opportunity to reach younger audiences and foster a deeper connection with traditional knowledge.

4. **Gender-Inclusive Storytelling:** It is essential to amplify the role of women in oral storytelling. Women have historically been the custodians of family-based oral traditions, and their contributions to moral education should be recognized and promoted. Initiatives should focus on ensuring that women's voices are equally valued in public oral performances.

REFERENCES

- Achebe, C. (1958). *Things Fall Apart*. Heinemann.
- Diop, C. A. (1971). *Precolonial Black Africa*. Lawrence Hill Books.
- Fayemi, K. (2019). *Social Media and the Future of African Leadership*. African Leadership Journal, 5(3), 24-35.
- Fayemi, K. (2019). *Social Media and the Future of African Leadership*. African Leadership Journal, 5(3), 24-35.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral Literature in Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J. (2016). *Proverbs in African Literature*. Journal of African Studies, 12(3), 45-60.
- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J. (2016). *Proverbs in African Literature*. Journal of African Studies, 12(3), 45-60.
- Okafor, U. (1999). *Folklore and Leadership in Igbo Culture*. University of Nigeria Press.
- Oruka, H. (1990). *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Routledge.
- Oruka, H. (1990). *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*. Routledge.

PRODUCE POLITICS, EXPLOITATION AND PROTEST IN HELON HABILA'S FICTION

BY

Baribor Joel Lebe PhD.
Institute for Distance Learning
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt Rivers State
baribor.kerenwin@iaue.edu.ng +234 806 276 2446

ABSTRACT

This work examines the relations between produce politics, exploitation and protest in Helon Habila's literary art. There is a relation in African prose between fiction and protest, and socio-political commentary. This study examines the voice of social agitation in the literary landscape, using the trilogy of Helon Habila, *Measuring Time*, *Waiting for an ANGEL* and *Oil on Water* as primary resources for its analysis. The study adopts a qualitative approach by examining the thematic foundations, stylistic devices, rhetorical and narrative strategies employed by the author, in the bid to offering incisive commentary on issues ranging from unjust produce politics, governance and corruption to human rights and social justice issues of exploitation and abuse. The study further explores the dynamics of the relationship between narrative fiction innovativeness and socio-political engagement, it elucidates how the social novel form serves as an instrument of dissent and as an avenue for bolstering the collective consciousness of society. The findings of this study include that protest in African literature results from the fight for equity and social justice and a struggle against produce politics, intimidation, dehumanization, degradation of the environment through political exploitation. Thus, it is the commitment of African literary writers that has made African fiction a protest literature, especially as seen in Habila's trilogy. The study adopts a mix of eco-criticism and Homi Bhaba's strand of Postcolonialism. These critical approaches expose both the relational and contextual inequalities and the unequal power relations that perpetuate unjust and inhuman conditions. The study concludes that african prose remains a powerful utility for exposing the socio-political dynamics of unjust conditions and inhuman practices of produce politics and governance deficit. The protest voice of African fiction is a primary feature committed to correcting the ills that inhibit sustainable development in Nigeria and Africa at large.

INTRODUCTION

Life for many is binary in nature. There is good and evil. There is white and black. There is in literature a writer that is a praise singer or eulogist. There is also a literary writer that takes the disposition of a protest writer. Whether the writer is a teacher like Chinua Achebe, or a town crier like Gilbert Ogbowei, or a minstrel like Tanure Ojaide or like Jeremiah the weeping prophet. The writers and their art are conditioned by their assignment, environment and the form of artistic expression they choose. Literature cannot be separated from protest. Protest cannot also be perfected without the input of literature. Perhaps this is because both literature and protest are both social constructs of the society. It is important to stress that protest is an important starting point for the formation of social movement, and governmental intervention. If a protest persists for too long without any favourable response from the party protested against, it is likely that some radical entities of the protest will resort to organizing a movement-which may take actions that

have deleterious consequences.

There is an organic link between African literature and protest. Oral literature is a major influence source, and antecedent of African written literature. In African literature both oral and written, it is not strange to find strong element of commitment of the author to the deployment of literary art to fostering communal peace, prosperity and progress. This approach is mainly due to the communal ownership of literature. This characteristic of African oral literature is transferred to the novel or other forms of written literature. The prevailing social situation or condition of the society at any point in time is its major determinant of the temperament of its literature. African literature of the post-colonial epoch is reactionary, distraught, and dissenting. The situation of injustice, inequality, religious violence, environmental degradation, corruption, political instability, economic strangulation and impoverishment, failure of political leadership, social malaise and indiscipline degenerate into suffocation of the masses which often erupts into restiveness, demonstrations and protests.

The deep-rooted connection between literature and society has given rise to a type of literature that is committed to the social problems or problems of society. It is this type of literature that we are concerned with in this work. Shyamolima Saikia in "Literature and Social Protest: Understanding Albert Camus' *The Outsider*" offers a definition of protest or social novel;

The social novel, also known as the social problem (or social protest) novel, can be defined as a "work of fiction in which a prevailing social problem, such as gender, race, or class prejudice, is dramatized through its effect on the characters of a novel". Some more definite examples of social problems dealt with in such works are poverty, situation in factories and mines, the problem of child labour, violence against women, increasing crime and epidemics because of overcrowding, and poor hygiene in cities ("Social Novel," par.1). It is also used to describe mid-19th-century fiction which examined specific exploitation and suffering concerning the working classes. Mostly written from a middle-class viewpoint, it sometimes aimed to bring about legislation and so on (124).

Our interest in this study therefore is in locating within the fictional works of Helon Habila characteristics of the social novel in African literature. The novels *Measuring Time*, *Waiting for an ANGEL* and *Oil on Water* would be read as works of literature that portray prevalent social malaise. This means that we consider the literary writer as taking the responsibility of serving as literary historians that chronicle social inequalities, contradictions and injustices that society undergo in the hands of tyrants, despots and dictators. The suffering, exploitation, crimes against humanity that are perpetrated by social psychopaths masquerading as political leaders are often endured by the masses in silence.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The subject of protest is not a novel idea in African literature. Countless studies and investigations have been carried out. Shyamolima Saikia traces the history of protest novel in 19th century England thus;

Possibly, Victor Hugo's 1862 work *Les Misérables* was the most significant social protest novel of the 19th Century in Europe. His work deals with most of the political and social issues and artistic leanings of his time. Among other French writers, Émile Zola's social protest works include *L'Assommoir* (1877) which dealt with life in an urban slum and *Germinal* (1885) about a coal miners' strike, which was described by Zola as throwing up the twentieth century's most important question, namely the clash between the forces of modern Capitalism and the welfare of human beings essential for its development (125).

The above historical antecedent of the protest novel reveals that it was a social movement against the oppressive force of capitalism. It also gave voice to the issues of human welfare. The forerunners of protest fiction wrote about the poor masses that lived in slums. Rohini Jha in her “Witnessing Africa's Development as Protest Literature: Exploring Bessie Head, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka holds that; “Writers' views and their expressions on colonialism was mouthpiece of general mass and natives. The spark of rage gradually turns into protest and simultaneously literature was also flourishing and came out as protest literature”. This underlines the fact that first generation of postcolonial African writers lend their art to protest literature as they lament the oppressive and exploitative stance of European colonial sojourn in Africa.

Abayomi Awelewa and Rosemary Osariemen Awelewa in their, “Poetics of Protest: Examining the Fusion of Poetry and Social Commentary in Nigerian Literature” identify forms of protests thus; “Street demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts have marked periods of political upheaval, but artistic expression, particularly through music, poetry, and protest concerts also plays a crucial role in mobilizing the masses and amplifying their voices” (47). It is significant that protest literature is identified as amplifying the voice of the oppressed. Margaret Poloma offers us a definition of protest that is encompassing. “Protest is a process that may be instrumental in the formation, unification and maintenance of a social structure; protest has been used as a weapon for agitation by groups seeking power, by groups holding power and by groups in the process of losing power” (67).

Many perceive protest fiction as a lack of literary commitment on the part of the writer. This position is debunked by Oniyide Ajisafe Akingbe in his “Social Protest and Literary Imagination in Selected Nigerian Novels”,

This position has often been misconstrued by their critics as “propagandistic,” that is, wrongly utilizing literature as a means of advancing grossly partisan ideological goals. However, this study evaluates how the selected writers have employed protest as a mode of discourse with which they delineate the socio-political vices of corruption, maladministration and unemployment in Nigeria, while remaining committed to their calling as literary artists (12).

Ben-Fred Ohia in “Revolutionist's View of African Fiction as a Protest Literature: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain Of Wheat*” confirms that African literature has continue to be instructive in its responsibility of serving as the voice of protest that drives socioeconomic change and wellbeing. He posits that, “Most of the first batch of written literature in Africa had the tone of protest resulting from “weeping,” with slavery, colonialism, lamentations of suffering and sorrows. These writers strive to redefine, reappraise and regain the lost identity through their literary works, hence the concept of protest literature” (50). Though, several works have been done on the subject of protest in African literature, we intend to embark on a study of the subject with special focus on the novels of Helon Habila. The study adopts eco-criticism of Harold Fromm and Cheryl Gloflety and Homi Bhaba's postcolonial theory.

MOTIFS OF PROTEST IN *WAITING FOR AN ANGEL*

Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* tackles headlong the evils of military rulers and their civilian collaborators. This orchestrates a shift of theme and concern away from the impact of colonization and the historical past toward an examination of current socio-political problems of abuse of power by the ruling elite, corruption and pronounced social inequity. *Waiting for an Angel* underscores the reign of terror orchestrated by successive military administrations in Nigeria, especially the military regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. The novel is a documentation of the atrocities of the military in all facets of Nigerian life between 1990 and 1998. The narrative of torture, victimization and brutality in the novel is presented from

the viewpoint of Lomba, who serves as the novel's central character. He is a journalist and writer, a person whose versatility with words and keen insight enable him to delineate society in such a way that the arbitrariness of historical interpretation of events becomes clear.

Although intelligent, he has abandoned his pursuit of a degree in English because of the prolonged closure of his university by the military authorities, and is forced to take up journalism on *The Dial*. Lomba was arrested and kept in detention when a coup was attempted against the maximum ruler, General Sani Abacha, by some officers close to him. While in prison, Lomba kept up with his creative writing but this was soon exposed to the prison authorities by his fellow inmates, thereby exposing him to the ire of the prison superintendent:

“So, you won't talk. You think you are tough,” he shouted, „You are wrong. Twenty years! That is how long I have been dealing with miserable bastards like you. Let this be an example to all of you. Don't think you can deceive me. We have our sources of information. You can't. This insect will be taken to solitary and he will be properly dealt with until he is willing to talk.” (*Waiting for an ANGEL*, 14).

Waiting for an Angel is a novel composed of seven interrelated stories. Its significance lies in its capability to capture socio-political circumstances and events which border largely on state sponsored violence during the Babangida and Abacha military regimes. The novel opens with the incarceration of Lomba and other political prisoners and closes with violence in which a prominent journalist, Dele Giwa is killed and *The Dial's* premises are set ablaze by soldiers. The novel reflects Habiba's thoughts on the political crisis in Nigeria in the late 1990s. Protest against the military is carried out by socially-marginalized men and women in society. Lomba, the protagonist, is ubiquitous throughout the novel. Through this device, Habila is able to condemn the corruption and authoritarianism of the military dictatorship. Although the novel has a loose plot, its political message is nevertheless striking. This is realized through specific and beautifully-drawn characters like Alice, Joshua, Kela and James. The narrative of military brutality is sufficiently articulated by the characters in the novel as well as the colourful evocation of its locale, emphasizing street names, filthy environments and the many casualties of military brutality that ostensibly portray Nigerian life.

The portraiture of the military in *Waiting for an Angel* is foregrounded in a semiotic of deprivation and destruction. This can be seen in the deprivation of the downtrodden masses on Poverty Street, the urban debris of Lagos with its squalid slums, its suppurating sewers, its huge craters on the road, and the mountain of filth and dirt of Egunje Road. Rot and dilapidation demarcate the landscapes of Nigeria during Abacha's rein of terror. The political class and members of the opposition are decimated due to constant arrest and outright liquidation. Political repression and the economic marginalization of the mass of the people has led to the virtual elimination of the embryonic middle-class. Habila retrospectively presents indictments of the oppression and corruption of the Abacha regime. *Waiting for an Angel* takes an unambiguously committed political stand on degradation of humanity by the military. Terror and violence are inscribed in the narrative of the seven stories in *Waiting for an Angel*. Such a narrative combines a grotesque irony with chillingly realistic details of the regime's propensity to employ torture and summary execution as a convenient weapon of violence and terror. In line with its status as a work of fiction, the novel weaves a narrative that reflects actual practices and events during the Babangida/Abacha regimes. One of such events is succinctly captured when Joshua, a civil rights activist, is brutalized by the police, on the orders of the military sole administrator, during the change of name of *Morgan Street* to *Poverty Street*:

All eyes, including those of the police, were on Joshua as he jumped down from the drum and headed for the police column on the north, where an inspector, fat and furiously moustached, stood in front, tapping his leg with his baton, looking undecided. The inspector turned and whispered to his men, and just as Joshua reached him, he did a curious thing. He raised his right hand and brought it down sharply. And his men

charged. (*Waiting for an ANGEL*, 134).

The author of *Waiting for an ANGEL*, portrays such motifs like incarceration, police brutality, extra-judicial killings, despotic military authoritarian governance, widening socioeconomic gap between the ruling class and the poor masses, silencing of dissenting voices and political killings of members of the opposition. This deliberate fusion of unjust and inhuman elements and conditions in the narrative therefore foregrounds the authors' commitment to making his novel a work of protest.

Protest of Exploitation of the Weak in *Measuring Time*

In the novel *Measuring Time* Helon Habila's, main character, Mamo, and his mother, Tabita are victims of power manipulation, control, and dominance as they are treated unfairly and the able-bodied characters' decisions control their lives to their detriment. Lamang, a handsome, manipulative young man, who wields the power to charm young maidens in the village and who eventually marries Tabitha, Mamo's mother is described in a popular village ballad as:

King of Women
 Owner of ten women
 In every village, from Keti to the state capital
 Mother sighing with longing
 Daughter sighing with longing
 Ah, King of women
 Show some mercy (*Measuring Time*, 14).

The descriptions of Lamang, using the metaphor 'King of Women', and 'Owner of ten women' reflects the manipulative powers, Lamang wields over women in the novel. Further, the use of repetitions in the refrain, 'Mother sighing with longing', and 'Daughter sighing with longing' shows Lamang's powerful control over the emotional feelings of the women of Keti. The verbal phrase 'sighing with longing' portrays the helplessness of the young maidens towards their feelings, which Lamang would often turn down. The plea in the last line, "show some mercy" speaks of the exploitation and helplessness of the weak-women. The excerpt below describes Tabitha's father and his conversation with Lamang over his daughter's marriage.

Owner of Cattle, had no male child, and Lamang, a shrewd businessman even then had immediately seen the financial benefits of such marriage. He said to the man, "I love your daughter, I will be happy to marry her, but I am only a poor student, how can I take care of her in the style you've brought her up in?" (*Measuring Time*, 14).

In the passage above, the nomination strategies used to describe Lamang's character include the adjective, 'shrewd businessman' in the main clause '... had immediately seen the financial benefits of such marriage', which describes Lamang as an opportunist and exploiter. Lamang's selfish nature and manipulative character are further revealed through the first-person pronouns, 'I love...', 'I will be happy...', the adjective, 'but I am only a poor student' and the rhetorical question, 'how can I take care of her...?' are manipulative strategies to extort the wealth of Tabitha's father. From the foregoing, it is obvious that Tabitha, who is a sickle cell patient is not allowed to decide if she should marry and whom to marry. Her father dialogues with Lamang and gives her away in marriage because he has no male child. This is exploitation from both father and Lamang.

First, the man waived the bride-price, which Lamang wasn't in a position to pay anyway, and then he gave him twenty head of cattle as a wedding gift, and promised to make him his heir. A month later the marriage between the beautiful but sickly girl and the village play boy was solemnized in the village church (*Measuring Time*, 14).

In the excerpt above, verbs such as 'waived', 'gave', and 'promised' reflect how Lamang manipulatively

married Tabitha without paying a dime. Rather, Musa, Tabitha's father is willing to cede his wealth to Lamang. The adjectival descriptions of Tabitha as, 'the beautiful but sickly girl' and Lamang as, 'the village playboy' portray the concept of unequal power relations in the story. Mamo's mother eventually dies while giving birth to Mamo and his twin brother, Lamamo because of her ailment. Moreover, Mamo inherits his mother's sickle cell ailment and battles neglect, hatred, and rejection from his father, who prefers his twin brother Lamamo to him because Lamamo has a sound health and is free from sickle cell anemia. In Mamo's words, he describes his feelings at Dr. Shingle's visit to their home. Besides Mamo, there are two other victims of power abuse and control, whose disabilities become points of referents by the able-bodied characters, without recourse to the psychological trauma such denigration may bring. Take for instance, Toma or One Leg, Haruna's military buddy, who loses a leg in the civil war, is addressed by his disability, while Haruna who returns from the same war without any physical injury is called 'soja' (soldier). Toma recounts his ordeal.

I lost my leg on a mission. Three of us were sent to blow up a bridge. We, re, we failed. Our sergeant was shot, the other man, a private like me, was taken prisoner. I was lucky --I was shot in the leg, but I escaped by lying low for a whole day in a crag in the riverbank (*Measuring Time*, 45).

Considering what Toma went through during the war, he should have attracted more honour for his disability but rather, he is addressed disparagingly after his disability as 'One Leg' (*Measuring Time*, 45). Lamamo also faces similar verbal abuse at the loss of his eyes as a soldier, fighting for a rebel group. Kutubi, his commandant mocks him as 'Mr One-Eye' (*Measuring Time*, 65), provoking Lamamo and he kills Kutubi. Such derogatory labels manifest as forms of asymmetric power relations in the novel between the disabled characters and the able-bodied characters. From the foregoing, it is apparent that Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* thematically portrays the disabled characters as victims of power abuse, and manipulation and the able-bodied characters as power wielders and enactors.

Protesting Militancy and War on the Environment in *Oil on Water*

It is significant that militancy is portrayed in the novel *Oil on Water* a response on the despoliation of the environment. Militancy therefore arises as a need to fight against and confront the agents of destruction. The war therefore, is a form of militancy to liberate the region. It is an eco-war that has gained ground in this area to make the government heed to their demands. It is from this premise that we perceive and identify militancy as a form of protest and resistance to environmental ruination. Militancy therefore, is the main thrust of the story which has been well-crafted by Helon Habila to expose environmental degradation in the Irikefe Island, of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. War, militancy and protest here refers to the armed conflicts between different groups in the Niger Delta area over oil. Oil production in the Niger Delta Region has given rise to an "oil war" (*Oil on Water*, 37) between the federal soldiers and the militants, who are fighting for the protection of their land. Due to poverty, lack of employment, basic social amenities like schools, hospitals and good transport network, protests against oil company pollution of the environment, environmental degradation, kidnapping for ransom, sabotage and theft through oil syphoning has become hallmarks of the Niger Delta Region as depicted in *Oil on Water*.

Habila presents militancy as a form of resistance and war for the protection of the environment though their activities as well are harmful to the environment. The militant groups which I refer to as Eco terrorists include, the Black Belts of Justice, the Free Delta Army, and the AK-47 Freedom Fighters (*Oil on Water*, 34-35) comprising of youths, criminals, and school dropouts like Professor, a militant kingpin. However, youth restiveness has equally become a major problem in this area. The community bears the brunt of the war as violence, looting and killing under the name of freedom fighting contribute to further degradation of the

environment. The idyllic relationship between man and the environment is portrayed by chief Ibrahim:

Once upon a time they lived in paradise. It was a small village close to Yellow Island. They lacked for nothing, fishing and hunting and farming and watching their children grow up before them, happy. The village was close-knit, made up of cousins and uncles and aunts and brothers and sisters, and though they were happily insulated from the rest of the world by their creeks and rivers and forests, they were not totally unaware of the changes going on all around them (*Oil on Water*, 42).

This is short-lived and destroyed by the emergence of oil exploration and activities in the region. The innocence, bliss and peaceful coexistence is shattered by the greed, avarice and selfishness of the government and the oil multinationals. Priests from different shrines got together and decided to build this shrine by the river to cleanse the land from blood and pollution:

when the blood of the dead ran into the rivers, and the water was so saturated with blood that the fishes died, and the dead bodies of warriors floated for miles on the river, until they were snagged on mangrove roots on the banks, or got stuck in the muddy swamps, half in and half out of the water. It was a terrible time. The land was so polluted that even the water in the wells turned red. (*Oil on Water*, 115).

The sculpture garden with cultural artifacts or figures was also built to represent, “the ancestors watching over us. They face the east to acknowledge the beauty of the sun rising, for without the sun there would be no life” (*Oil on Water*, 128). The above excerpt shows how land is treated in this community with a lot of love and respect. That is why Chief Malabo refused the huge offer from oil companies to buy the whole village, and with the money they could relocate elsewhere and live a rich life. (*Oil on Water*, 43). Chief Malabo is a custodian of traditional values and an environmentalist, who is the main face of protest against environmental degradation and resistance to petrodollar corruption. As custodian of tradition, no amount of money could be paid to him for their ancestral land to be sold out to foreigners, “Chief Malabo had said no, no on behalf of the whole village he had said no” (*Oil on Water*, 43).

To protect their land from encroachment and resist the lure of oil money, which was short-lived, an island shrine was established for worshippers with sculptures representing; “the ancestors watching over us” (*Oil on Water*, 129-130). The people have a sentimental attachment to their land because it defines their existence. Chief Malabo is symbol of resistance and protest against environmental ruination, exploitation and socioeconomic oppression in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

Conclusion

Helon Habila’s novel, *Oil on Water* is a postcolonial ecocentric text which reflects some socio-economic realities and environmental hazards that are affecting the rich, oil Niger Delta of Nigeria in particular and the world at large in this era of globalization. The petroleum industry has polluted the environment to the extent that traditional sources of income like fishing and farming is no longer possible. There is resentment that the region does not benefit enough from the oil wealth. Resort to conflicts, protests, demonstrations, militancy and restiveness has been taken as the only way to expressing grievances by the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups, in the oil-rich communities in the region, who feel they are being exploited.

It is apparent that Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* thematically portrays the disabled characters as victims of power abuse, and manipulation and the able-bodied characters as power wielders and enactors. The theme of disability as liability and the disabled characters as being delusional; persons whose dreams, desires, and plans never materialized, even at the point of their breakthrough and visibility is an indirect protest. For instance, the disabled protagonists in Habila's novel, Mamo and Lamamo never witnessed the height of their

successes but rather faced disappointments. Mamo's article, challenging Rev. Drinkwater's history of the Keti people, which brought him to the limelight, in the end, is not published. Besides, the history of the Waziris of Keti land, which Mamo compiles, ends as a mere manuscript.

Helon Habila's *Waiting for an ANGEL* reinforces the powerful repressive impulse of the dictatorial government by blurring the boundaries of one military regime and another; he replaces events that happened under the 1985-1993 regime of General Ibrahim Babangida, such as the assassination of journalist and *Newswatch Magazine* editor Dele Giwa, into the five year span from 1993-1998 of General Sani Abacha's regime. Although the acts committed under the historical regimes of Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha are fictionally compressed in the novel, the Abacha coup takes on a particular significance in indicating the seemingly deterministic cyclic nature of the military state. The lower level military perform grass-roots level exploitation. Placed in front of the petrol pumps ostensibly to control the masses as they wait to receive their allotted amount of petrol, the soldiers model their leaders, using their individual job placements to claim their own cut of the national cake. Those without the means to pay off the soldiers are forced to wait in long lines, at the risk of the petrol finishing before they reach the pumps. Even those drivers who have obtained petrol find traffic "obstructed" by the long queues, further slowing down the city's ability to function. Military exploitation has corrupted the very rules by which society functions. A reading of the trilogy reveals an intentional literary commitment on the part of the author to protest human unjust treatment of his fellow, inhuman ruination of the environment and military and institutional government degradation of the people.

Works Cited

- Akingbe, Oniyide Ajisafe. *Social Protest and Literary Imagination in Selected Nigerian Novels*. UNILAG Repository. <https://ir.unilag.edu.ng>.
- Awelewa, Abayomi. and Awelewa, Rosemary Osariemen. "Poetics of Protest: Examining the Fusion of Poetry and Social Commentary in Nigerian Literature". *AKSU Journal of English*. <https://aksujournalofenglish.org.ng>.
- Habila, Helon. *Waiting for an Angel*. New York: Norton, 2003.
Measuring Time. New York: Norton, 2007.
Oil on Water. Abuja: Cassava Republic. 2011.
- Ohia, Ben-Fred. "Revolutionist's View of African Fiction as a Protest Literature: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *A Grain Of Wheat*". *International Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics*. Volume 7, Issue 1, 2024, 49-57. www.abjournals.org.
- "The Protest Tradition in African Literature: Symbolism in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*". *Journal of Humanities, Music and Dance*. Vol. 03, No. 05, Aug-Sep 2023. <http://journal.hmjournals.com/index.php/JHMD>
- Poloma, Margaret. *Contemporary Sociological Theory*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1979.
- Saikia, Shyamolima. "Literature and Social Protest: Understanding Albert Camus' *The Outsider*". *Social Science Journal of Gargaon College*, Volume III, January, 2015.

NIGER DELTA LITERATURE: ORIGINS, PROPAGATION, PROCESSES AND PROSPECTS

Baribor Joel Lebe PhD.
Institute for Distance Learning
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Rumuolumeni Port Harcourt Rivers State
baribor.kerenwin@iaue.edu.ng +234 806 276 2446

Abstract

This study is an exploratory historical discourse of the question, “what is Niger Delta Literature, its origin and relation to Nigerian literature”? It is observed that there is paucity of research and published material on the subject of Niger Delta literature. Niger Delta literature is presently a course for study in undergraduate programmes of tertiary institutions of learning. This condition has made it imperative to provide empirical data on Niger Delta literature. This is a qualitative research study that traces the historical emergence of Niger Delta region and her literature, identifies how the literary art of the region has flourished and the processes required for consistent development and possible prospects. Amongst the findings of this study is the fact that Niger Delta region and literature is a precursor to the Nigerian state and her literature. Niger Delta literature fulfills the required parameters in literary historical study for the delineation of a regional or national literature and could therefore be regarded an independent, self-sustaining literary corpus.

Keywords: Niger Delta Literature, Origin, Definition, Regional Literature, History

Introduction

Misconceptions abound about what actually is the emerging literature tagged, “Niger Delta Literature”. There are those that think that there is no literature of the Niger Delta region. Others opines that literature is a national cultural phenomenon, hence no people or geopolitical zone is capable of evolving a literature of their own. There is also the challenge of what constitutes the authentic Niger Delta by all parameters of demarcation. Our attempt here is not to join issues with any of the erring and obnoxious schools of thought that have taken a stand against an eternal fact, the existence, sustenance and continuance of literature of the Niger Delta region and her people. It is our focus to illustrate through this literary dialectic the historical emergence, survival and flourishing of a budding literary tradition that is known and accepted as Niger Delta literature. Our discursive roadmap would be to establish a geopolitical cartography for the space referred to as the Niger Delta. Identify the ethnic nationalities that occupy such a space so identified and thereafter attempt a concise historical development of their literature. Thereafter, it would be necessary to identify the landmark point of birth of Niger Delta literature and the birth pangs that differentiate it from other forms of literature both nationally and globally. Our singular objective is to establish the irrevocable and inarguable emergence of literature of the Niger Delta as a distinct literature by merit, character and existence.

Benedict Binebai in his intellectual Opus Magnum *Creating a Speaking Space: The Dimean Paradigm of Nationalism in Post-Colonial Nigeria* writes,

Literature is a strong banner of cultural nationalism. This is where the writer comes in, the writer's works in any form they manifest, tell the story of the hero and the villain. The work contains the wisdom of liberation and spread nationalism from generation to generation challenging the bloody dream of the oppressor bloodlessly and silently to cripple the potency of his evil moral mortar (113).

We are therefore engaging in an intellectual act of cultural nationalism when we strive to assert and affirm our cultural heritage as a people by defending our literary heritage as independent and not an appendage of another. Nationalist struggle here according to Benedict Binebai is bloodless rather than bloody. It is not mere affirmation of facts and claims but the asserting of superior truths and evidence against distortion of reality and propaganda. However, we but begin to correct centuries long wrong that Niger Delta literature is the harbinger of modern Nigerian literature and not vice versa.

Origins and History of Niger Delta Literature

it is a fact known to anyone that cares to know that our dear country Nigeria came into existence in 1914 through the colonial Governor General Lord Lugard. When he amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates for British ease of administration and economic profit. However, before the abolition of the slave trade in Europe and the “Slave Coast” of West Africa, certain independent city states and ethnic nationalities inhabited the coastline of the Atlantic Ocean and were referred to as the “Bights of Benin and Biafra (later Bonny)”. These ethnic nation states were earlier involved with the Europeans in trade relation, diplomatic ties and has consular posts on the coast proving beyond doubt that Niger Delta ethnic nation states were regarded by the European colonialists as independent nations. Tekena N. Tamuno in his seminal work, *Oil Wars in the Niger Delta 1849-2009*, avers that;

prior to the inauguration of the West African Squadron in 1810, there was no British standing force in The Bights. European and African traders looked to the Delta principalities to provide the protection so vital to commerce. For close to 300 years, the Delta states served well the trade interest of both parties. It was these age-long institutions that the newly arrived naval power had begun to challenge and was later to undermine and destroy (2).

Niger Delta principalities were in charge of trade dealings with Europeans, provided protection, charged commission and ensured peaceful relations ever before the nation Nigeria emerged as an instrument of political profiteering. However, this trend were Niger Delta intellectuals and leaders would protect their turf and the Atlantic coastline was short-lived. Tekena N. Tamuno laments:

However, with the advent of a new British Consul in The Bights and the semblance of an administration by the man-on-the-spot, in 1849, there was an instrument available to settle disputes amicably or by force, if the need arose. Thus began “gun-boat” diplomacy in the Bights. Consular jurisdiction in the Bights, from 1849 brought about several crises and conflicts between African heads of the city-states, on one hand, and European “super-cargoes” or traders on the other. When arbitration failed, gun-boat intervention led to the deportation or deposition of African heads of the city-states unwilling to accept one-sided settlements (3).

The above is a few amongst many historical events that establish the Niger Delta region as a precursor to the Nigerian state. The literature of a people is a function of their cultural heritage. Literature, like other forms of artistic expression, is conditioned by time and space. It is also a cultural manifestation and representation of humanity as it reflects the ideals, sociopolitical ideology, deeds and hopes of specific historical epoch. The Niger Delta region has not been without literature. Yet, until recently, that literature has not been given much specific attention or studied at length or with depth of consideration. In the case of the Niger Delta, it will not be out of place to say that there were no people known as the Niger Delta people or region before the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates by Sir Lord Lugard in 1914. Before the colonial era the people and space known as Niger Delta were separate but mutually coexisting ethnic nationalities of the Ogonis, Izons (Ijaw), Ikwerre, Egi, Egenni, Urhobo, Okrikans, Ekpeye, Igbos, Efiks, Ibibios, Annangs,

Adonis, Yorubas, Ibanis and Kalabaris, etc. These ethnic nationalities were nation states who lived peacefully with their neighbours from the riverine and the upland hinterland. They did business with each other and shared cultural experiences through trade and cultural engagements like festivals, marriages, fishing and wrestling competitions. The literature of Nigeria especially the Niger Delta is often delineated historically into precolonial, colonial and post-colonial. While the precolonial speaks of the oral literature of the various ethnic nationalities and the precursor to colonial and postcolonial written literature in Nigeria, the postcolonial or modern literature is also regarded by some scholars as modern Nigerian literature in English.

Niger Delta literature in the precolonial epoch existed as oral literature performances in the genres of the *Sung*, *Spoken* and *Acted*, each corresponding to the Nortrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* nomenclature of poetry, prose and drama. Our oral literature as a form of literature possesses elegant aesthetic elements of form and style that is required of the literary, and artistic. The *sung* genre of Niger Delta poetry is found in our war chants, praise songs, work songs, libations, ritual incantations, dirges, elegies and eulogies for bravery and heroic deeds. Of peculiar nature is the ideo-phonics, drum accompaniment, dance steps and use of condensed metaphors and motifs of Niger Delta oral poetry. The *Acted* is no less grand and theatrical. In the Niger Delta the tradition of the oral literary performances is vividly captured in the adaptations of J.P. Clarks' *Ozidi Saga*, Ola Rotimi's *Akassa You Mi*, *The God's are not to Blame*, and Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horsemen*, *The Raft*, and recently Benedict Binebai's *Drums of the Delta* and *My Life in the Burning Creeks* and Henry Leopold Bell-Gam's *King Jaja*, *The Hidden Treasure* and *The Dreams of Obio*.

Niger Delta oral literature is one that reflects and mimics the blissful, idyllic, nature at its pristine state of interdependence and equilibrium between humanity and naturality. It is the literature of moonlight tales, the story of the cunning and crafty tortoise or spider, the story of legends, and myths that story acts of bravery and heroism and Amazonian women that ruled kingdoms and conquered territories. Much of this kind of oral literature is still at large, lost and awaiting harvesting and adaptation. However, modern Niger Delta literature is a paradigm shift from the portrayal of chaste and serene communities struggling against the rising tide of multifaceted exploitation. Modern Niger Delta literature examines the social menace of neo-colonialism. It is a poetics that bewails the erosion of moral values, the disintegration of the communal cohesive architecture of society, the debilitating effect of oil politics, the conflict and resultant crisis for the pecuniary gains of petrodollar and the callous ruination of the ecology of the region and the concomitant devastation of the social well-being of Niger Deltans. Literary works like J.P Clark's *The Wives Revolt*, Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen also Died*, and Uzo Nwamara's *Dance of the Delta*, *On a Darkling Plain* and *Prisoners of Jeb's* by Ken Saro Wiwa, *Marsh Boy*, Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*, *the heedless Ballot-Box* by Gilber Ogbowei, *Tomorrow Died Yesterday* by Chimeka Garricks, *Oil on Water* by Helon Habila, and *The Activist* by Tanure Ojaide, lament the impoverishment of the oil-rich Niger Delta through bad leadership, government collaboration with multinational oil companies to defraud the region, through the creation of internal rivalry.

Defining Niger Delta and her Literature

What parameters define the literature of a region, nation or state? The duty of delineating any literature or the literature of a certain people is domiciled in the field of literary history. Literary historians would have us understand that such factors as the following are considered in delimiting literatures: whether or not the said factors truly serve to demarcate the boundaries of one literature from another is entirely a different matter.

1. Nationhood
2. Language

3. Culture

4. Environment

Nationhood: the act and art of delineating literature into regional, national or continental it traced to literary history in Europe. This is because a nation unlike a country has to do with a prevailing ideology and philosophy held by a people with a common language, culture and territory. Whereas country implies amongst other things the territorial and geographical boundaries occupied by the nationals. There is a long-standing tradition in literary history of examining a literature from the perspective of the nation from where such literature is produced or derived as the case may be. According to Afam Ebeogu in his “African Literature: Regional, National and Ethnic Imperative,”

Literary history began as a science in Western Europe at a time when the acknowledged units of European history were the nation-states. Accordingly, it developed along national lines, each literature being examined independently of the other (22).

Thus, the implication for us here is that literatures were categorized based on their national feature. The literatures of Ghana, Kenya, and Congo are all distinct from one another because of their different ideological commitment. The Niger Delta is a regional geo-political block or zone in Nigeria that comprises of many ethnic nationalities that have lived together in harmony for hundreds of years before the coming of European traders to the shores of the Atlantic that border the region of the Niger Delta. These ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta are bound by the environment, politics, and the socioeconomics of crude oil exploration in the region. The prevailing socio-politics of the region as the goose that lays the golden egg and the albatross of the Nigerian state is an epicenter that makes the ethnic nations identify together as one Niger Delta region. This is mostly prevalent in her literature than anywhere else. Chinyere Nwahunanya provides a sociopolitical description:

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is traditionally defined as the area drained by the tributaries of the River Niger before it enters the Atlantic Ocean. In more recent times however, the geographical boundary of the area has been redefined politically and extended to include all the areas where there are confirmed petroleum deposits been extracted by foreign and local oil companies. This area made up of nine states in the Southern part of Nigeria is covered politically by the interventional operation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (xiv).

It is affirmative that the region is recognized both geographically and politically as a distinct unit in the sociopolitical template of Nigeria. It is this peculiar ideological feature that separates it from other geopolitical units in the country that qualifies it for a literature of its own.

Language: literature rides on the back of language resources of a people more than any other single factor. There cannot be a literature outside of a people's language. Our language as a people is the vehicle that hosts and transmits our cultural values from which artistic and literary works are drawn. Ebeogu Afam further avers that,

At that early stage in the evolution of literary history, the nation tended to be culturally and linguistically homogenous, so that when one talked of the literature of a people, one always implied a literature written in the people's language. It is in this regard that Willa Muir could argue that German literature was the product of a language, German (22).

The striking implication of the above position is that literary history recognizes language as a major factor in delineating or categorizing one literature from another. Thus, the question of which language should be regarded as the language of the Niger Delta region? As imperative as this question may look, it is one that

comes late and already has been answered through other institutions like politics, education and governance. The right question should be, with what language do the ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta region relate in trade, education, politics, governance and so on? The obvious answer is, the English language. The English language which is the official lingua franca of Nigeria also doubles as the language of the Niger Delta region and literary nation. The significance of language in the classification of literature hinges on the fact that language (in our case words like; kpo-fire, pipeline vandals, unknown gunmen, militants, etc.) is responsible for the kind of thought it expresses, and also ensures that what is expressed must have an organic relationship to the aspirations and imaginative constructions of those who use it.

Culture: the business of petroleum exploration and extraction has become a cultural unifying factor that is a rallying point for the ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta region. Phrases like “the Niger Delta Struggle”, “resource control” and “revenue allocation” are pointers to the fact of an emerging way of life that is no longer limited to farming, fishing, and petty trading. Considering the fact literary writers do not write in a vacuum, Niger Delta literature in the 19th to the 20th centuries are also defined by prevailing socioeconomic realities of the region. Ebeogu Afam further clarifies;

National literature, in the circumstances, could not afford to ignore these factors that have helped in the evolution of the new kind of nation. It began to breathe the national spirit; it reflected the national culture of the people and derived its unique inspiration from the history, environment and institutions of such people (23).

The sort of regional or national literature in question here is such that emerges from the prevailing cultural experiences of the people. The history of the struggle for resource control and revenue allocation formula in the region, the oil institutions, the politics of petroleum interventionist agencies, and an environment that links one ethnic nationality to another seamlessly are cultural factors that more than anything else is responsible for a peculiar literary orientation that is particularly Niger Delta in purpose and perspective. This is unavoidably true as language is a non-material component of culture and the vehicle for producing and transmitting literature.

Environment: it is inarguably true that environment is a predominant factor for the geopolitical creation of the Niger Delta region/nation. The term *environment* in literature is not limited to the physical, outdoor, flora and fauna out there. Environment embraces the abiotic and biotic, the human and non-human habitat; it includes the entire the entire ecosystem with man at the centre. The Niger Delta environment is a peculiar temporal and spatial category. Kontein Trinya holds that,

“Niger Delta” was essentially a geographical label for the delta of the River Niger with its other major and minor tributaries that empty into the Atlantic Ocean. With the creation of that Commission, the term began to designate not merely the cartographical delta communities of Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States but also became a regional nomenclature for all the coastal and Southern Nigeria States where crude oil was been produced. The six others were: the three coastal states of Edo, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River, and the other three in the family of nine “oil producing states” Abia, Imo, and Ondo States (398).

The Niger Delta is defined by its environment more than anything else. Kontein's position offers us the platform of saying there is both the cartographical and the geopolitical Niger Delta all rolled into one. The singular environmental factor of being endowed with natural resources of great economic value binds the diverse ethnic groups together and reveals itself in her literature. Chinyere Nwahunanya labels the literature of Niger Delta as a literature of protest and conflict resolution while Tanure Ojaide writes that it is a literature that reflects the locale and is informed by the geographical, sociocultural, political and biological factors, and Benedict Binebai, in “Dramatizing Subaltern Speakability: Nationalism and Economic Identity in Ola

Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi*," holds

Niger Delta drama can be understood as a drama written about the region by a playwright who is either an indigene or a non-indigene of the region. Such a work should, apart from showcasing the Niger Delta setting and its relationships with the outside world, show the people's cultures, portray their socio-political and economic struggles and other experiences (55).

The various positions of scholars above only serve to reinforce the eclectic nature of Niger Delta literature which is a reflection of the multivariate and cosmopolitan Niger Delta. However, no single definition is all encompassing and final. The definitions reveal the scope, content and subject matter of Niger Delta literature. If we were to attempt a definition at this point, we could describe Niger Delta literature as a historico-cultural emergent art of a dispossessed people who engage their literary art to provide value, protest violence against the environment and humanity, and provoke aesthetic remedies of sustainability through a literature of commitment and entertainment.

It is however significant to note that the traditional literature of the people of the region is so exotic and rich that even in modern times it still serves as the primary source of inspiration, adaptation and motivation to its' writers. The orature or traditional literature of the Niger Delta is a composite or total form of literature. Modern literature of the Niger Delta gradually takes the form of the prevailing individualistic nature of modern society when compared to the traditional communal literature which emphasizes the people rather than the person. This feature of the literature of the Niger Delta is not unconnected to the environment. We would not be the first to attempt defining Niger Delta literature. Very many scholars have taken it upon themselves to describe the body of literary work that constitute Niger Delta literature. Rebecca Ufuoma Davies in her work entitled, "Niger Delta Literature: Emerging Thematic Preoccupations in Nigerian Literature" holds that it is; "The lively and ever-evolving corpus of writing known as Niger Delta literature captures the political, social, and cultural aspects of Nigeria's Niger Delta. The writing is beginning to be recognized on a global scale as a significant voice in Nigerian literature" (178), it is not a mere body of writing but more of a socio-cultural renaissance. It is also not beginning to gain global recognition but has also been the pacesetter literature of global relevance. Other nations of the earth had dealings with Niger Delta forbears on the coast before those in the hinterlands. Pavan Kumar Malreddy traces the development of Niger Delta literature in his work, "Militant Metaphors: Precarity and Violence in Niger Delta's Conflict Literature", he opines that it is;

a rich legacy of literary responses to Niger Delta's grievances as fictionalized in the first wave of writers such as J.P. Clark's *Wives Revolt* (1991; *All for Oil*, 2000), Isidore Okpewho's *Tides* (1994), Ken Saro-Wiwa's *A Month and a Day* (1995), poetry collections such as Ibiwari Ikiriko's *Oily Tears of the Delta* (2000), and Nnimmo Bassey's *We Thought it was Oil - But it was Blood* (2002), which were chiefly concerned with the sociocultural and ecological costs of the aggressive oil exploration in the region since the 1970s (4).

The writer above agrees with Chinyere Nwahunaya's label of "conflict literature". He also attempts a historical trace of Niger Delta writers. However, the authors he describes as first wave writers are not completely true. Pioneer writers emerged in the Niger Delta before these set of writers, we had such writers as Dennis Osadebay and Ene Henshaw. Chinyere Nwahunanya avers;

Again, the pioneering role of the Niger Delta in the emergence of Nigerian/African literature has also been underplayed, sometimes unintentionally because of ignorance of the nativity of many writers. But as a number of essays here show, due to their early exposure to education, Niger Delta writers naturally became pioneers, featuring such

names as Olaudah Equiano, Pita Nwana, James Ene Henshaw, Gabriel Okara, Mabel Segun (nee Imokhuede), Zulu Sofola, J.P. Clark and Elechi Amadi. The seeds these pioneers planted have over the decades blossomed into the numerous award-winning writers that have dotted the world literary landscape (xv, Introduction- *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta*).

Tanure Ojaide in his “Indigeneity, Globalization, and African Literature” posits that,

The terms Literature of the Niger Delta and Niger Delta Literature are used interchangeably in this study to mean works of literature that have been produced by both indigenes of the Niger Delta and outsiders about the region. These literary works are either set in the Niger Delta or take their themes from the experiences of the people of the region. This study attempts to define Niger Delta literature and examines it as a reflection of the experiences of the region's people. This literature also reflects the locale and is informed by, among others, geographical, bioregional, sociocultural, and political factors (55).

Another very striking definition of Niger Delta Literature is given in the seminal volume on Niger Delta literature *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta* by the editor Chinyere Nwahunanya thus:

The lachrymal literature of the Niger Delta is encased in a tone of lament or mourning. It is a literature that deploys the emotion of tears to elicit sympathy and empathy for the human condition in an identifiable human location; as it draws the attention of men and women of conscience to the plight of the exploited, the oppressed and the subjugated, marooned as it were in their natural habitat. This literature solicits positive interventions that would erase or at least alleviate the sufferings occasioned by hunger disease and poverty (39).

Therefore, Niger Delta literature from our perspective is a literary art both in oral or written form, expressed in either poetic, dramatic, narrative composition by a literary artist on the subject matter of the region whether he or she is an indigene or not and portrays the setting, themes, culture and experiences through the language of fiction. It is simply, literary work of Niger Delta interest and inclination, that focuses on the environment, culture and people of Niger Delta. Niger Delta literature is the imaginative, aesthetic and literary representation and portraiture of the worldview, identity, and sociocultural experience of Niger Delta society and her environment in literary art.

The Processes of Niger Delta Literature

Literature does not exist in isolation. It is a societal tool of ideological construction, orientation, and political emancipation. There are certain social factors that interact for the sustainable formulation and production of a national or regional literature. It is the interaction of these societal elements that is referred to herein as the processes. Scholars agree that literary production refers to the process through which literary works are created, disseminated, and received within a particular socio-cultural context. This concept encompasses not only the writing of texts but also the influences of social, economic, and political factors on the creation and interpretation of literary works, highlighting the interplay between literature and society. Ogareva Ekaterina. I., Kruglov Roman. G. in their essay entitled; “The Modern Literary Process as a Factor of the Socialization and Integration of Russia and China” writes that; Fiction that has in its arsenal all the main mechanisms of socialization carrier and source of the most important means of socialization (such as language and speech, elements of spiritual culture) can act as a significant factor in the formation of state ideology (54). The salient implication is that while adaptation and inspiration is the primary process for the

creation of literary works, the secondary process like publishing, accreditation, and research and studying are more powerful apparatus of state for control, economic gain and political domination through the vehicle of socialization. (encouragement and censure, imitation, reflection, identification), and is both the avenue for the flourishing or withering of targeted cultural heritage.

We shall mention some of these factors here (Government recognition of literary writers, tertiary research and grants, the politics of publications, inclusion in Certificate Examination, approval for Study etc.) but are interested only in examining a few of the factors below.

National or Global Recognition of Niger Delta Writers

Literature is a major tool of political socialization, orientation and domination no doubt. The Niger Delta region is not only rich in oil mineral but also human intellectual capital. It has been observed that there is a systematic ploy to keep her literary writers from the limelight of political recognition but nationally and globally. The Niger delta is host to such literary giants like departed Obi Wali, Gabriel Okara, Kenule Saro Wiwa and Elechi Amadi, Ola Rotimi all prolific writers. With us today are great writers of merit some of which include: Benedict Binebai, Nathan Saviour Agoro, Barine Saana Ngaage, Leopold Bell-Gam, Obari Gomba, Ted Elemforo, Kaine Agary and many others. However, none of these writes have been accorded international recognition, nor won global awards though their works are studied in many nations of the world. This tactical ploy to keep us as minority in the arts limits our political and socioeconomic reach.

Research and Studies in Niger Delta Literature

It is most significant to note that until recently Niger Delta literature was not a course of study in the undergraduate programmes of study in the Universities/Tertiary institutions in the Niger Delta region. It is in the last two decades and with the introduction of Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (CCMAS) by the National University Commission (NUC) that Niger Delta Literature began to find a place in the course allocation of departmental boards and faculties of humanities and the arts. However, before this recent development, the region was flooded with a strong literary cultural imperialist tendency of other ethnic nationalist literature that have almost replaced Niger Delta literary art. The onus is on us to awake to ensuring the sustainable study of Niger Delta literature at the undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels. The gains of research in any literature cannot be overemphasized. Shafiqullah Rahmani, Sayed Asghar Hashimi, Ehsanullah Bayan, writes in "The Value of Research Methods in Literary Studies" that; "research has a fundamental position for the development, strengthening, and growth of all sciences and especially literature, so it is necessary to identify and recognize the value of research methods in literary research" (2036). It is therefore our corporate responsibility to advance, strengthen and develop our Niger Delta literature by ensuring sustainable purposeful research and innovative study of it.

Politics of Publishing

By the politics of publishing we mean or intend to relate that literary art is championed in modern societies by the production and dissemination of literary works that serve political purposes such as ideological orientation, conscientization, inculcation, magnification and promotion of values and ideas. It is for this reason that culture (literature) and religion is part of Louis Althusser's *Ideological State Apparatus*. A region that desires to advance its literature would need to come up with state publishing firms and required publishing technologies to fast track the production of its literary art. Tanure Ojaide in "The Politics of African Literature: Production, Publishing and Reception" holds that;

African literature is political and politicized as it contests political issues and proffers

political visions... there are political issues involved in the production, publishing, and reception of literature written in Africa. Here politics intersects with the culture, society, economy, zeitgeist, and other aspects of contemporary African reality. Politics in literature, as used in this chapter, has to do with a conscious or unconscious effort, choice, strategy, or the lack of any determination to do something with particular results anticipated. Politics involves ideology, ideas, and notions of the African reality that writers, publishers, and readers have to deal with in relation to contemporary African literature (195).

It is obvious that we cannot separate politics from literature or literature from politics because of the interdependence of one upon the other. Any people that leave the production and dissemination of their literature and by extension their cultural articulation in the hands of others will soon wake up to realize that foreigners have turned to ancestors for aborigines and their cultural heritage have been sold in the market place of democracy. In order to avoid this ugly trend, institutions, and well-meaning individuals of the region must as a matter of urgent need set up funds and publishing houses to ensure a robust production of her literary heritage consistently. There should be a regional literary art hub that awards and publicizes works of great merit in order to keep the torch of literary excellence in the Niger Delta burning bright and loud. Creative and critical talents must be given platforms for showcasing their prowess, thereby connecting them to potential publishers who would take up their works for profit by publishing them.

Conclusion

Literature and its development the world over is a defining parameter for calibrating sociopolitical advancement. The finest of the literature of the Niger Delta is yet to come as if we agree that, *The Beautiful Ones are Not Yet Born*. Our literature is been suffocated by other regional arts through the dichotomy of major and minor ethnicity and the politics of book recommendation and usage in academics. Niger Delta region is both richly endowed with mineral and literary resources that when harvested and harnessed will tremendously advance our sociopolitical progress. It is not accidental that regional statemen like Edwin Clark, Ken Saro Wiwa, Obi Wali, Adaka Boro to mention but a few were men of letters in their own merit. This is our time to reinvent our literature, project our literary heritage and reach out to harvest exotic oral literature still lying fallow in the creeks, hamlets, and communes of the Niger Delta. Niger Delta region and her literature should not be doubt as to what it entails.

Works Cited

- Amadi, Elechi. *Speaking and Singing (Papers and Poems)*. Port Harcourt, University of Port Harcourt Press, 2003.
- Binebai, Benedict. *Creating a Speaking Space: The Dimean Paradigm of Nationalism in Post-Colonial Nigeria*. Ibadan, Kraft Books Limited, 2013.
- "Dramatizing Subaltern Speakability: Nationalism and Economic Identity in Ola Rotimi's *Akassa Youmi*". UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities Vol 13 No 1 2012. (P. 52-73). Retrieved : <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v13i1.4>. 18th Dec, 2025.
- Davies, Rebecca Ufuoma. "Niger Delta Literature: Emerging Thematic Preoccupations in Nigerian Literature", *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences Vol-8, Issue-3; May-Jun, 2023*. Accessed: <https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.83.29178>.
- Ekaterina, Ogareva I. Roman. Kruglov G. "The Modern Literary Process as a Factor of the Socialization and Integration of Russia and China" (On the Example of the III Forum of Young Writers of China and Russia), Administrative Consulting. 2020. No. 7. 53–60. <https://www.researchgate.net>.

- Malreddy, Pavan Kumar. "Militant Metaphors: Precarity and Violence in Niger Delta's Conflict Literature". *Postcolonial Text* Vol 20 17, No 2 & 3 (2022). Accessed: <https://www.postcolonial.org>.
- Nwahunanya, Chinyere (Ed). *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta* New Owerri, Springfield Publishers Ltd. 2011.
- Ojaide, Tanure. "Indigeneity, Globalization, and African Literature". <https://link.springer.com>.
- Tamuno, N. Tekena. *Oil Wars in the Delta 1849-2009*. Ibadan, Stirling-Horden Publishers Limited, 2011.
- Trinya, Kontein. "Shadows of Development in the New Poetry of the Niger Delta: The Poetry of Ibiwari Ikiriko, Ngozi Agoh-Jacobs, Ebi Yeibo, Tonyo Biriabebe, and Barine Ngaage". Nwahunanya, Chinyere (Ed). *From Boom to Doom: Protest and Conflict Resolution in the Literature of the Niger Delta* New Owerri, Chapter 31, (98-410), Springfield Publishers Ltd. 2011.

REVOLUTIONARY PRESSURE IN THEME AND CHARACTERIZATION IN NGUGI'S *PETALS OF BLOOD*

Nsan Eneyo

Department of English and Literary Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt
Email: nsan.eneyo@iaue.edu.ng Phone: +2347059013098

And

Atankere John OTOKWALA
atankere.otokwala@iaue.edu.ng
Department of English and Literary Studies
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

Abstract

This research work is a conscious attempt to investigate the revolutionary importance of the works of African writers in the struggle for social equality and egalitarianism in Africa. *Petals of Blood* by Ngugi Wa Thiong'O is used here to analyse the artistic effort thereto. To achieve this, Marxist criticism subsumed under sociological criticism is used as the theoretical framework, with a view to analysing the revolutionary consciousness in the novel through theme and characterization

Introduction

Revolution is an integral part of the human society and existence whereby the will or interests of the common man is a preponderant issue and thus advocated. It could be regarded as a populist movement. "Populism is a political or rhetorical style which holds that the common man is oppressed by the elite in society who exists only to his own interest and therefore, the instrument of the state needs to be grasped from this self-serving elite and used for the benefit of the people as a whole" (Amaechi 1).

Historically, revolution has been a veritable tool in every event of change in the annals of history. The revolutionary movement led by Leon Trotsky in October 1917 in Russia is a point to note. The slave rebellion led by Spartacus against the rulers of ancient Rome is another example of revolution in antiquity and as part of human existence.

In modern time, the recent Niger Delta resource control struggle and the Egypt's political uprising attest to the fact that "No man pushed so hard to the wall that will not react or better still resist". Revolution, hence, is a conscious effort or attempt made by an individual or group in a bid to resisting oppression, economic deprivation, political marginalization, high-handedness, and all other evils associated with class-consciousness held by the elite in a society.

As a literary concept, Udentia agrees that revolutionary aesthetics (consciousness) is part of African literary process. He explains this when he says "The works of Ngugi ...and others are optimistic... and are heavily infused with the idea of revolution" (10). This assertion shows that revolutionary aesthetics dominates African literature.

Theoretical Framework

For the purpose of this paper, the theory of marxism will be examined briefly to situate this study. Marxism is a strand of Sociological criticism. The sociological critics according to Worgu, believe that "literature is caused by something and the cause is socio-cultural"(91). Whereas the formalists see literature for its literariness, "sociological criticism examines literature in the cultural, economic and political context in which it is written or received" (Kennedy & Gioia 2194). This approach, simply put, tends to consider the dialectical relationship between literature and society. Here, the social and cultural era in which the writer lives and writes, the segment of the society that his or her work represents and the audience such literary

work seeks to address are requisite issues in the critical analysis (literary criticism). This is true base on another basic assumption "which begins on the premise that authors do not write in an economic vacuum but are conditioned by the society, time and place in which they live" (Worgu 92). Ngugi whose work is considered here must have been conditioned or, put it 'challenged' by the socio-cultural cum economic status of the society in which he belonged.

A very influential type or sub-category of sociological criticism is Marxist criticism. This is because Marxism "focuses on the economic and political elements of art" (Kennedy & Gioia 2194). Revolutionary literature which is our major concern in this study is subsumed under Marxism.

Marxist criticism or dialectical approach is culled from Karl Marx's theory of 'Dialectical materialism'. This theory believes "mainly that in order to survive in this world, man requires certain basic material objects especially food, clothing and shelter" (worgu 93). To him, this theory goes further to explain that 'in order to possess these things man enters into partnership with his fellow men'. And Marx contends that very soon contradictions begin to manifest in this partnership with one class-those with the capital or means of production oppressing the other class - those who supply ordinary labour" (Worgu 94).

All these are explaining Marxism as an economic concept. However, it is imperative to note that Marxism also is "an effective tool for analyzing the functions and forms of literature" (Eyoh 67). In the same vein Eagleton cited in (Eyoh 67) states that "the aim of Marxism is to explain the literary work, paying sensitive attention to its forms, style and meanings and 'grasping those forms', styles and meaning as the product of a particular history", Worgu agrees to this position when he says that "Marxist critics concern themselves not only with social realism but also with aesthetic consideration, with questions of 'form and content' as integral part of criticism" (94). This means that Marxist critics acknowledge form and content as integral part of criticism.

"Whereas the formalist critic would maintain that form and content are inextricably blended" (Kennedy & Gioia 2194), Lukacs cited in Kennedy & Gioia believes that "content determines form... therefore, all art is political" (2194).

Another aesthetic implication of this critical approach is the question of base-super-structural model of the society. This view is taken from Karl Marx's idea of 'economic structure of society' (Eagleton 5). Explaining this, Worgu (95) affirms that "the totality of worker -entrepreneur relations of production constitutes the productive forces that form, for Marxism, the 'economic base' or 'infrastructure' "from this economic base in every society emerges the "super-structure".

Also another aesthetic view held by Marxist critics is the relationship between literature and ideology or call it 'art and ideology'. It is imperative to know that "Marxist critics... believe that literature has a n organicrelationship with the dominant ideology of the society..." (Worgu, 96). The meaning of ideology here as a Marxist concept is that "Ideology is not... a set of doctrines; it signifies the way men live out their role in class- society, the values, ideas and images which tie them to their functions and so prevent them from a true knowledge of society as a whole" (Eagleton 15). Hence, Worgu posits firmly that "art, under the influence of ideology, seeks to influence social and political relations by affirming or rejecting the dominant views of society" (97). To further buttress the fact that literature and ideology are intertwined, Eagleton establishes that 'works of literature are just expressions of the ideologies of their time' (16).

Above all, Marxist critics recognize 'realism' as the most form of artistic representation. Realism here helps to literature as a recreation of social reality. The interesting thing about realism in literature is "its infinite capacity to encapsulate, in a microscopic form, the complex totality of social reality" (Worgu 97). Here, Marxist critics tends to consider how well a writer is able to capture the human society, its ills and success; recounting the socio-economic complexities of the human race in an artistic form. Lukacs cited in Eagleton accords greatness to artist who "in a world characterized by schisms between the general and the particular, the conceptual and the sensuous, the social and the individual, can recapture and recreate a harmonious

totality of human life" (Worgu 97). For Lukacs "a realist work of art represents a concentration of a complex, comprehensive set of relationship between man, nature and history..." (Worgu 97). Hence, Marxist criticism considers very integral the place of realism as, in the words of Worgu, "the most authentic form of artistic representation." Amuta in Eyoh agrees to this when he says that the essence of realism is, "the fictional representation of a slice of social experience in a manner that reminds us through the laws of probability and causality of everyday existence (71). Therefore, according to Lukacs, the alliance of socialism with realism may be said to have its roots in the revolutionary movements of the proletariat "(Eyoh 71).

Revolutionary Aesthetics in Theme and Characterization

There is no doubt that Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* chooses the side of the people in the politics of class struggle while addressing the problem of political disillusionment occasioned by these class power structures in post-independence Kenyan society. This paper considers the revolutionary pressures imbued in theme and characterization in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. In doing this, there is a need to give an overview of the key concepts—theme and characterization.

Theme is the writer's major concern, which serves as the foundation upon which other issues (sub-themes) could emerge. It is the central message which dominates a work of art and probably the writer's mind. Holman (cited in Worgu 32-3) sees theme as "the abstract concept, which is made concrete through its representation in person, action and image in the work." This 'abstract concept' which the writer has to make concrete becomes his major concern and probably the central message or domination idea in his artistic mind. In this sense, economic exploitation and oppression in the neo-colonial state of Kenya could be seen as the dominating issue running through Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. It is important to note that through the theme(s) in work of art readers are availed the opportunity to draw the essence of such work. Worgu explains this about theme when he says "... a theme answers the question, what does this story reveals? And not 'what does this story teach?" (34). Also, it is necessary to state quickly that, writers in all interpretive fictions build up their themes through the characters. This means that theme cannot exist in isolation without the characters. Perrine supports this when he says, "in many stories the theme may be equivalent to the revelation of human characters."

Characterization in a simple sense refers to all the available human and non-human characters and their respective roles as employed by a writer in course of building up the story. Characterization emanates from the word 'character'. A character in fiction is used to refer to both inanimate and animate objects which play the role of humans in a particular story. Therefore, characterization is "the act or process of representing human characters or personality in fiction" (Worgu and Orlu cited in Icheke 3). The importance of characters in a story cannot be over emphasized. This is true because no story can exist without the role and presence of the characters. Therefore, a writer who apparently has a story or theme to share must do so through the employment of the characters and their roles. His success as a writer is solely dependent on how well he is able to fix and assign appropriate roles to his characters. Bennett validates this view in the following words "the foundation of good fiction is character-creation and nothing else.... Style counts, plot counts, originality of outlook counts. But none of these counts anything like... the convincingness of the characters" (Jerome et al 102). Character-creation here refers to characterization.

The discussion above had so far shown that the success of a writer is built around the message or idea dominating his authorial vision and how well the message is presented in a fictional form via the character creation process. Therefore, in the light of the above position, we shall discuss the revolutionary pressures in theme and characterization in *Petals of Blood*. That is to say, as much as we discuss the theme and its

revolutionary significance, the characters and their roles towards the realization of the themes shall dominate the discussion.

Petals of Blood takes us to a period in the Kenyan political history after the 'Mau Mau' war. The war was an internal war which was decidedly geared towards eliminating (fighting) western colonialism. It was part of the nationalists' move for political and economic emancipation. The war supposedly brought about political independence in Kenya. However, the story in *Petals of Blood* reveals that the Whiteman 'left through the front door and came back through the back door. The back door here refers to their black representatives through whom the interest of the populace is polarized. This apparently, gives birth to the evils of neo-colonialism (domestic imperialism) which *Petals of Blood* seeks to address. Saying that imperialism is the focus of Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* is not out of place. Ngugi himself confirms this in his comment during the launching of the book. He says;

Imperialism ... can never develop a country or a people. This was what I was trying to show in *Petals of Blood*: that imperialism can never develop us, Kenyan. In doing so, I was only trying to be faithful to what Kenyan workers and peasants have always, realized as shown by their historical struggles since 1895 (Amuta 145).

As an advocate of radical social change that he is, Ngugi in *Petals of Blood* concerns himself with the ordeals of the 'common man' which emanate from the indiscriminate acts of exploitation, dehumanization perpetrated by these black imperialists. Hence, the theme of the novel is exploitation and dehumanization. This theme, therefore, gives way to the revolutionary consciousness of the masses as a way of dismantling capitalism which breeds imperialism. Ngugi, in achieving this employs significant events which we shall subsequently consider.

It is important to note that *Petals of Blood* seems to suggest solution to the noxious problems facing the contemporary Kenyan society. This solution in the view of the novel rests on the readiness of the peasant workers to rise and resist economic imperialism championed by their black brothers. Thus, the revolutionary consciousness in *Petals of Blood* is immanent in theme and characterization.

Theme:- The socio-political cum economic milieu pictured in the novel is that which is dominated by capitalism as an economic system which thrives on the treacherous act of imperialism with the masses as the victims and the capitalist few as the parasites. This scenario brings to bare the theme of oppression and exploitation. This is because, for every capitalist system oppression and exploitation are the key consequences which obviously brew resistance, violence and other revolutionary measures. This is evident in the reaction of the workers on the arrest of Karega and others. They out rightly revolt against the excesses of the capitalist Lords and their agents, saying:

...disband the tyranny of foreign companies and their local messenger! Out with foreign rule policed by colonized black skins! Out with exploitation of our sweat! (POB 4).

The novel begins with the introduction of four major characters namely; Karega, Munira, Abdulla, Wanja and the attendant arrest of the three of them - Munira, Karega and Abdulha in connection with the death of the three sons- Chui, Mzigo and Kimeria. The arrest and detention of these characters is an aspect of oppression unleashed by the government (the oppressors). This is because, both Munira, Karega and Abdulla are lured into police cell on the pretext of 'routine questioning'. Unfortunately, they are detained for days as against the promises made to them by the police officer who came for the invitation. It will be recalled that Abdulha was slapped by the police when he issued a protest against the deception. It is against this background that critics see the police as agents of imperialism used by the government (the oppressors) in the dehumanization of the peasantry.

The events that further buttress the theme of oppression are embedded in the various parts of the novel as structurally organized. The part one of this novel which incorporates the arrest discussed earlier, also portray Wanja as a victim of circumstance. The death of the three Ilmorog sons in a fire set on Wanja's

brothel could be interpreted in Marxian sense as a revolutionary step boldly taken by Munira to probably put an end to the persistent sexual exploitation of Wanja by these agents put an end to the persistent sexual exploitation of Wanja by these agents of the parasitic capitalists. Wanja at this point is not only exploited materially or economically but also sexually. This is an act of oppression that evidently should invite a revolutionary act that is seen in the arson committed by Munira.

Our attention is equally drawn in this part, to the resolve of the workers' union to embark on industrial action even though it was aborted. However, the picture created here is of a people who are totally dissatisfied with the system and the activity of the elite towards the populace.

The second part of this novel entitled 'Towards Bethlehem' draws one's attention to the biblical story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised Land. It marks the resolution of the people to embark on a journey to the city in search of social change for Ilmorog. While this act illuminates a level of revolutionary consciousness, however, it tends to explain the fact that the people are oppressed. The oppression here is evident in their major complaint about the dispossession of the people's land. Here, the voice of the narrator is heard lamenting thus "they went to work on farms stolen from Kenyan people" (POB 123).

It means the people are denied the right to control their land. And in a bid to put an end to this exploitative act "so many men and women and children were willing to join." in the movement to the city (POB 126). In the latter part of this second part, another example of the exploitative tendency of the upper class trying to silence the voice of the masses in the detention of Munira, Karega and Abdulla at the central police station on getting to the city is show cased. These are events of oppression, which the only alternative is revolution so as to bring about egalitarianism. Thus, the revolutionary pressure here becomes so glaring as the people appear very resolute to salvaging the society from the shackles of the parasitic hydra-headed cankerworms, in spite of all trepidations involved in the journey. Another significant thing here, is the record of political disillusionment. It is discovered on getting to the city that Nderi Wa Riera is after all representing his selfish interest instead of the people who put him there.

Part three which is captioned 'To Be Born' records the changes that follow the journey to the city. Such changes like, the construction of the trans-Africa road linking Ilmorog with other parts of Africa, the establishment of industries like banks, distilleries, breweries etc. Ironically, the changes are avenues whereby the capitalists launch a-more-sophisticated ways of exploiting and oppressing the populace. To acquire a land for agricultural purpose one must undergo processes that are apparently unattainable for the 'common man'. Even to get a loan from bank one needs some parcel of land as collateral - the land which has been stolen by them! It is indeed an extreme case of exploitation.

The last part of this novel suggests a continuation of the struggle. This means that there is a high level of dissatisfaction with the purported change that seems to rob Ilmorog of its original pastoral features. Like we mentioned earlier, the people consider the infrastructural developments as vehicles of exploitation and oppression of the ordinary people. Thus, the expropriation of the people's land is a deliberate attempt to deny the people their means of livelihood having known that the people are predominantly agrarians.

Characterization: - In an attempt to demonstrate and substantially portray the evils of imperialism in a capitalist society of post independence Kenya in the work *Petals of Blood*, Ngugi presents two groups of characters whose interests, philosophy and ideologies vary. The first group is the protagonist group: Munira, Karega, Abdulha and Wanja representing the oppressed class. The other which is made up of Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria, Nderi Wa Riera and the likes, whose roles qualify them as traitors, oppressors, betrayers and above all agents of 'imperialism' representing the 'oppressive' class, a class that pride itself with the dehumanization of the of the peasantry and working class for maximum profit. As a matter of fact, the issue of neo-colonialism arises consequent upon the roles played by the likes of Chui, Mzigo, Kimeria and Nderi Wa Riera as assigned by the writer. Neo-colonialism is thus bred by capitalism -a system that thrives on oppression and exploitation of the poor masses, which in effect kindles reaction; and the reaction of the

working class brings about the revolutionary atmosphere of the novel.

Events in the novel revolve around these major characters. There is though a collaborative way of character presentation. However, these characters have their individual traits. Nevertheless, they have a common feature irrespective of their different backgrounds. They are escapists and immigrants to Ilmorog. They are fleeing from a past they do not want to remember as it affects them individually. For instance, Munira does not want to remember his part as a failure; Abdulha seeks a hiding place to forget his roles in the Mau Mau struggle for liberation and the disillusionment that attends independence; Wanja sees Ilmorog as a hiding place to run to so as to forget about the distorted life in the city and the murder of an innocent child; and Karega, on his own part, having tried unsuccessfully to cope with city life, flees to Ilmorog to seek answers to the challenging questions facing the means of livelihood in the city.

Ngugi in his characterization tries to establish these two categories of characters with one representing the oppressors and the other representing the oppressed, the latter being so keen to fight oppression and enthrone egalitarianism. Be that as it may, the individual roles of these characters cannot be underestimated in the realization of the theme of the novel.

For the oppressors, we have Mzigo, Chiu, Kimeria and Nderi Wa Rieria. Among these, "the most repulsive of this urban group is Howskin Kimeria" (Worgu 79). This character (Kimeria) is not a consistent character as presented by the writer. He once belong to the oppressed group and perhaps finds out that he cannot cope, betrayed the trust of the peasantry in a bid to survive. Worgu observed that "he is the character who has fully imbibed the cynical city dictum later propounded by Wanja: 'you eat somebody or you are eaten. You sit on somebody or somebody sits on you'. (79). This means that Ngugi's portrayal of Kimeria is a replica of those contemporary Africans whose primary concern is their selfish interest thereby being willing to polarize the interest of the masses. He uses his financial success to take rantage of a young school girl Wanja whom he abused sexually.

Chui is almost found in the same circumstance with Kimeria, especially on the ground of eventually turning to what they detest *ab initio*.

Also among them is Nderi Wa Rieria whose excessive quest for political position is only rooted in selfish desire. Ngugi sees him as a prototype of contemporary African politicians who only remembers that the electorates do exist during electioneering campaigns. His political ambition is rather geared towards making the people poorer. This is true because "when development comes to Ilmorog, Nderi, instead of connecting with his people, connects with the Europeans and Americans in joint projects and investment ultimately designed to make the people poorer" (Worgu, 80). This is a man whose trust the people hold in high esteem, but are so disappointed to see him as being part of the oppression and exploitation which they suffer.

For these agents of capitalism, these traitors, betrayers and conspirators, the church, the police, the legal system etc. are not left out. They are also machineries through which the masses are oppressed. The incident where Joseph was taken to the 'Reverend Jerrod' where the latter only offers an ineffectual prayer, is a point to note. Another consideration is the arrest and unlawful detention of Munira, Karega and Abdulha both at Ilmorog and at the city when they went to seek a redress to the plight of the masses. In essence therefore, Ngugi, through characterization is able to show case the extent to which the populace is oppressed and exploited.

The second category of characters as said earlier is the oppressed class led by Munira, Karega, Abdulha and Wanja. Munira is a son to a man whose quest for materialism qualifies him as a member of the oppressors. Ironically, Munira does not snare similar ideology with his father, hence the desire to champion the course of the oppressed. At the beginning of the novel, just before his arrest, we are told that Munira has been in Ilmorog for about twelve years. His commitment to the course of education stands him out as a man who is interested in the future of Kenyan society. As a school teacher he is able to raise a level of revolutionary consciousness among his pupils through his teaching hence the children ask him: 'why did things eat each

other? Why can't the eaten eat back?' (POB 22). Munira felt that the world needs purification, perhaps, that is why he had to set Wanja's brothel ablaze where the three parasitic compradors die in the process. This, and his commitment to education could be interpreted in a Marxian sense as revolutionary acts.

Wanja is another character in this category who believes in the liberation of the people. She is the only female character among the protagonists. She is also a victim of oppression, exploitation, dehumanization and psychological crisis. She resorts to prostitution as an alternative to surviving the trauma brought upon her by the 'Cannibalistic' act of Kimeria. Wanja's resolve to prostitute could be seen as way of retrieving what have been taken from her, "however, her sense of revenge in this regard is misdirected to outright killing" (Worgu 84). This means that her prostitution is not just a negation of Godly moral standard but purports revolutionary pressure. Her stabbing of Kimeria at the end of the story equally portrays her revolutionary significance.

Abdulha with his amputated limb exemplifies another victim of dehumanization. In this fight for egalitarianism he has featured prominently. Hence the writer comments;

He had indeed endured thirst and hunger, briars and thorns in the scaly flesh in the service of that vision which just opened out to him the day he had taken both the oath of unity and later the Batuni oath (POB 36).

Karega is not left out in this group of characters. "Expelled from Sriana for leading one of the famous strike actions, Karega becomes an itinerant worker taking on whatever employment is to hand wherever he arrive" (Worgu 89). This explains that Karega's revolutionary consciousness begins at his early days, thus, marking him as a radical figure.

Generally, the four parts of the novel is replete with events that motivate revolution which is the major concern in the novel. It is arranged as movements from one stage to another in search freedom. Amuta summaries the four parts thus:

The peasants and workers of Ilmorog walk towards the capital city and in the process are reborn in a new consciousness about the real mechanism of neo-colonialism and capitalist exploitation. And thus equipped, they are ready for the struggle to over throw their exploiters, a struggle which is continuous and self-renewing. (148)

Revolution here is brewed by the incessant acts of exploitation and inhuman treatment prevalent in the story. The exploitation here simply refers to the taking over of the people's wealth and rendering them redundant; and employing the labour of the people who incidentally are the owners of the land, to work on the lands with little or no pay. Inhuman treatment, on the other hand is portrayed in the arrest and unlawful detention of the protagonists in this novel as earlier mentioned, who provide array of hope to the hopeless workers. The sexual exploitation meted out on Wanja is another act of dehumanization. All these brew a resistant spirit among the workers and peasants which culminates in revolution.

On characterization, events in *Petals of Blood* as shown earlier, revolve around Munira, Abdulha, Wanja and Karega, who through their individual and collective efforts a rouse revolutionary consciousness in the masses. On a close observation one sees the four major characters in a collaborative sense, trying to work collectively to resist imperialism. Thus, characterization is used as a revolutionary tool in the realization of the theme. Similarly, in attempt to establish the theme of oppression Ngugi presents to us a situation that brews revolution. Such a portrayal of the capitalist exploitation and oppression of the neo-colonial state of Kenya smacks off violence.

Conclusion

Ngugi's works are generally considered as revolutionary literature because they contain the desire to enthrone egalitarianism through protest of characters in the story. *Petals of Blood* is not any different from such work.

Note that according to Chabal and Paschal, "Africa is a region that works through a reverse logic of political disorder and irrationality, where politics is about bare-faced stealing and a game of the belly, where political motion is of oscillation and retreat, rather than any advance or progress and where the law of the jungle

subsists rather than constitutionalism". (cited in Agho and Bamidele 138).

As a result of the 'reverse logic of political disorder and irrationality' that characterize the post-independence African polity, writers resort to writings not just in the sense of being exalted as writers but as interventionists in this new consciousness of politics in Africa as the 'game of the belly', hence the writings of Ngugi wa Thiong'O' *Petal of Blood*

Works Cited

- Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Thomson Wards worth Ltd., 2005.
- Amuta, Chidi. *The Theory of African Literature: Implication for Practical Criticism*. Zed Books Ltd., 1989.
- Amaechi, Cyprian C. "Populist Ideology in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* and Iyayi's *Heroes*". A thesis submitted to the University of Port Harcourt. 2011.
- Agho, Jude and Bamidele A. "Festus Iyayi and the Poetics of Combat." Nwahunaya, C. ed. *From Boom to Doom: Protest and conflict Resolution in the Literature of Niger Delta*. Springfield Publishes, 2011.
- Eagleton Terry. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. Methuen & Co. Ltd. 1989
- ... *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Anniversary ed Malden: Blackwell Publishing. 2010.
- Eyoh, Luke. "Socio-Political Protest and Poetic Imagination in Clark-Bekederemo's *Public Poetry*." *Working Papers: A Journal of English Studies*. Vol. 2 (2003): 1 - 19
- Green, Eldred I. "The socio-historical Background to the Rise of the East African Novel." *Working Papers: A Journal of English Studies* Vol. 2 (2003): 66 -93.
- Jan-Mohammed, Abdul. *Manichean Aesthetics: The Politics of Literature in Colonial Africa*. University of Massachuset Press, 1983
- Jerome et al. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*. W. W. Norton & Company Ltd., 2002.
- Kennedy X. J. and Dana Gioia. *Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. Longman, 2002.
- Lenin, V. I. *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Foreign language Press, 1975
- Marx, Karl and Fredrick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Wordsworth Edition Limited, 2008.
- Ngara, Emmanuel. *Art and Ideology in the African Novel: A Study of the Influence of Marxism on African writing*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1987.
- Ngugi Wa Thiong'O. *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1977.
- Udenta Udenta O. *Revolutionary Aesthetics and the African Literary Process*. Fourth Dimension Publishes, 1983.
- Worgu, Ameafula A. and Anthony Orlu "A Marxist perspective of Realism and characterization in Ngugi Wa Thiong'O's *A Grain of Wheat*." *Icheke: Journal of the Humanities* vol. 1 (2010):1-10.
- Worgu Amaefula A. *Literature and Literary Criticism: An Introduction*. Nissi Books, 2006

THE LANGUAGE OF HEALING: EMOTIONAL EXPRESSIONS IN ABURENI AND THEIR ROLE IN SOCIETAL THERAPY

DANIAMI ETIRE

Department of Linguistics and Language Arts

University of Port Harcourt

dan.etire@dipato.com

Abstract

Language is a powerful tool that helps people express their thoughts through emotions and feelings, and shape how they understand the world around them. This study explores the emotional vocabulary of the Abureni language and how it plays a role in healing and emotional well-being within the community. Drawing on the Linguistic Relativity Theory (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis), the study investigates how Abureni speakers use language to make sense of their emotions and to support each other through spoken, culturally rooted therapeutic expressions. By examining specific emotional terms and expressions alongside local practices and beliefs, the study reveals how Abureni encodes unique cultural understandings of healing, resilience, and psychological care. These findings highlight how indigenous language practices are not only forms of artistic expression but also vital tools for emotional balance, community support, and mental health intervention. By situating the findings within broader conversations on the healing power of language and indigenous knowledge, the study highlights how the Abureni language, while serving diverse communicative functions, also embodies therapeutic potential in its emotional expressions and culturally grounded practices. Furthermore, the study aims to contribute to the wider discourse on the intersection of language, culture, and societal therapy.

Keywords: Abureni, emotions, language, indigenous knowledge, societal therapy.

Introduction

Language is not merely a conduit for communication; it is a vessel of emotion, identity, and healing. Across cultures, linguistic expressions serve as mirrors of internal states and as tools for navigating psychological and social challenges. In indigenous communities, such as the Abureni of Nigeria's Niger Delta region, language is deeply embedded in cultural rituals, oral traditions, and interpersonal relationships (Etire, 2015; Paul et al., 2023). Emotional expressions in Abureni are not only descriptive but also performative, often functioning as therapeutic acts that foster resilience, communal support, and psychological restoration.

This study investigates the emotional vocabulary and expressive patterns of the Abureni language, with a focus on how these linguistic elements contribute to societal therapy. By examining culturally rooted emotional expressions, the study explores how language facilitates healing within the community. The inquiry is grounded within the frameworks of the *Linguistic Relativity Theory* (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis) and the *Expressive Theory of Language and Emotion*, which together illuminate the dynamic interplay between language, emotion, and cognition (Lucy, 1997; Schwarz-Friesel, 2015).

The Abureni language is classified as a small and endangered language, with an estimated combined speaker population of about 12,300 reported in *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* (Eberhard et al., 2021). Despite its vulnerable status, Abureni remains a vital repository of indigenous knowledge and emotional wisdom. Its preservation is not only a linguistic priority but also a psychosocial one, as its expressive forms offer insight into culturally specific ways of regulating emotion and supporting mental well-being. By examining emotional terms, idioms and therapeutic speech acts, this study contributes to wider discussions on the healing power of language and the role of indigenous linguistic practices in mental health intervention.

Objective

This study investigates how emotional expressions in the Abureni language serve as culturally embedded mechanisms for healing and psychological support. Through the analysis of emotion terms, idiomatic expressions, and therapeutic speech acts, it examines how Abureni speakers use language to process emotional experiences and promote communal resilience. While previous works by native scholars like Etire (2020, 2023a, 2023b) have documented aspects of emotional expression, including song poetry and lexical items related to illness and pandemics, there remains a gap in focused linguistic analysis of the emotional lexicon and its therapeutic functions. This study seeks to address that gap by offering a deeper exploration of language as a tool for societal healing within the Abureni context.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on two interrelated theoretical perspectives: the *Linguistic Relativity Theory* (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis) and the *Expressive Theory of Language and Emotion*. Together, these frameworks provide a lens through which the emotional and therapeutic functions of Abureni language can be understood.

The *Linguistic Relativity Theory* posits that the structure and vocabulary of a language influence how its speakers perceive and interpret reality (Lucy, 1997). In the context of emotion, this theory suggests that linguistic categories shape emotional cognition and expression. For example, the presence or absence of specific emotion terms in a language can affect how individuals recognize, label, and regulate their feelings (Shablack & Lindquist, 2019). In Abureni, culturally embedded emotion words and idiomatic expressions reflect unique conceptualizations of healing, distress, and resilience, thereby shaping the community's therapeutic discourse.

Complementing this view, the *Expressive Theory of Language and Emotion* emphasizes the role of language in articulating and modulating emotional states (Schwarz-Friesel, 2015; Reilly & Seibert, 2003). Language is not merely a reflection of emotion; it is a mechanism through which emotion is constructed, shared, and transformed. In Abureni, emotional expressions are often embedded in communal rituals, storytelling, and interpersonal exchanges, serving as tools for psychological support and social cohesion (Etire, 2017; Etire, 2023a; Paul et al., 2023).

Together, these theories underscore the bidirectional relationship between language and emotion. They support the central argument of this study: that emotional expressions in Abureni are not only linguistic artifacts but also therapeutic instruments that contribute to societal healing. By situating the study within these theoretical frameworks, the research highlights the cognitive, cultural, and psychosocial dimensions of indigenous emotional language.

Literature Review

The relationship between language and emotion has long intrigued scholars across disciplines. Contemporary linguistic and psychological theories suggest that language not only reflects but also shapes emotional experience (Lindquist et al., 2015; Lucy, 1997). The Conceptual Act Theory (CAT), for instance, posits that language provides the conceptual scaffolding through which individuals interpret bodily sensations as emotions (Lindquist et al., 2015). Similarly, the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis argues that linguistic structures influence cognitive processes, including emotional perception and regulation (Lucy, 1997; Shablack & Lindquist, 2019).

In indigenous contexts, emotional expressions are often embedded in cultural rituals, oral traditions, and communal practices. Emananjo and Ndimele (2024), in their exploration of the communicative functions of human language, underscore its expressive role, noting that individuals employ both verbal and non-verbal forms to convey emotions, sentiments, and attitudes towards others or particular circumstances. As they

explain:

Language can be used as a means for expressing one's emotions, feelings, or attitudes towards one's fellow being or a state of affairs. Exclamations and swear-words are good examples of this (Emenanjo & Ndimele, 2024, p. 5).

This expressive function is particularly salient in African linguistic contexts, where emotion terms are deeply intertwined with local cosmologies and healing practices (Etire, 2023a; Echeruo, 2001). In Abureni, emotional vocabulary is not merely descriptive but also performative, serving as a medium for psychological support and social bonding (Paul et al., 2023; Etire, 2020; Etire, 2017).

Recent documentation efforts have begun to uncover the therapeutic dimensions of Abureni speech acts, especially in contexts of illness, grief, anxiety, stress, and communal resilience (Etire, 2024; Etire, 2023b; Daniel, 2017; Robert, 2019). These findings align with broader observations that indigenous languages encode culturally specific understandings of health, distress, and recovery (Ianna, 2017; Abdul-Kadhim, 2024).

Neurophysiological research using Event-Related Potentials (ERP) has further reaffirmed the pivotal role of emotion-label words in shaping perception. These studies demonstrate that emotion-label words more effectively prime the recognition of emotional facial expressions than emotion-laden words (Zhang, Wu, & Meng, 2025). The theory of emotional linguistic relativity continues to gain momentum, with cross-cultural research confirming that language-specific emotion terms significantly influence both the perception and experience of emotions (Ponsonnet, 2022). In a large-scale study involving fifteen African languages, Ahmad et al. (2025) identified distinct patterns in emotional intensity and co-occurrence, underscoring the importance of developing culturally sensitive emotion detection tools.

Further supporting this perspective, Thornley (2024) found that emotional expressions in indigenous languages are closely tied to wellbeing and cultural resilience, particularly when used in contextually rich and culturally embedded environments. These insights corroborate Etire's (2017) observation that emotional expressions in Abureni are deeply rooted in cultural context and stylistic nuance:

Some of the emotional expressions and interjections in the book represent a complex culture in both context and style with which good native speakers unleash to enhance the quality of their verbal communication and thrill their audience (Etire, 2017, pp. vii–viii).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, ethnolinguistic methodology rooted in the disciplines of linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis. The approach is specifically tailored to explore the intricate ways emotional expressions in the Abureni language serve as therapeutic instruments within the community.

To gather data, both primary and secondary sources were utilized. Primary data collection involved semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with native Abureni speakers, including elders, traditional healers, and community leaders. These interactions provided rich insights into emotional terms, idiomatic expressions, and culturally embedded therapeutic language. Secondary sources, such as archival materials, curated wordlists, and prior documentation efforts (Etire, 2015; Etire, 2023), were reviewed to complement and triangulate the findings, ensuring a robust and contextually grounded analysis.

The analytical framework comprised three key components. Firstly, lexical analysis was conducted to categorize emotional expressions according to semantic domains like grief, joy, and resilience, and to examine their morphological and syntactic structures. Secondly, discourse analysis focused on speech acts and narrative forms to understand how emotional language is deployed in healing contexts, including rituals, storytelling, and interpersonal communication. Finally, theoretical integration drew on the principles of Linguistic Relativity and Expressive Theory to interpret how language influences emotional

cognition and therapeutic practice within the Abureni cultural setting.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the study adhered to established ethical guidelines for linguistic fieldwork. Attention was paid to cultural sensitivity and collaborative engagement with the community, following best practices outlined by Czaykowska-Higgins (2009).

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the emotional expressions collected from Abureni speakers and analyses how they function within the community as tools for healing, emotional regulation and social support. The analysis follows the qualitative, ethnolinguistic approach outlined in the methodology, drawing on lexical, semantic and discourse-based insights. By examining how these expressions are formed, used and interpreted, the section shows how Abureni emotional language encodes cultural understandings of well-being, resilience and communal care.

1. Emotional Lexicon in Abureni

The emotional vocabulary of Abureni reflects the community's cultural values and the ways speakers make sense of their inner states. Earlier work by Etire (2015:78–79) notes that exclamations of joy and displeasure are common in the language, and this study builds on that foundation by examining a wider range of emotional expressions. Because Abureni is a tone language, all examples are presented phonetically with tone marks to support accurate interpretation by both native and non-native readers. This approach allows for a clearer understanding of how tone, sound and meaning work together to convey emotional nuance.

2. Sample Dataset

The study analysed fifty-five emotional expressions and organised them into seventeen original subthemes, grouped under seven broader umbrella themes. This two-tier structure preserves the distinctions within Abureni emotional language while highlighting the wider conceptual patterns that shape how speakers express, interpret and manage emotions. Each expression is presented with its phonetic form, gloss, intended meaning and cultural interpretation.

The umbrella themes represent the major emotional domains in Abureni, while the subthemes capture the specific communicative and therapeutic functions of each expression. Put together, they illustrate how Abureni speakers respond to affection, pain, confusion, moral judgement, social bonding, self-protection and communal care. This structure also supports the study's focus on societal therapy by showing how emotional expressions contribute to psychological well-being, social regulation and collective healing. The mapping of umbrella themes to specific subthemes is as follows:

i. Positive Emotionality and Social Bonding

- a) Expressions of affection, reverence and personal attachment
- b) Expressions of awe, wonder and positive amazement
- c) Expressions of abundance, sweetness and positive evaluation
- d) Expressions of joy, celebration and communal solidarity

ii. Pain, Distress and Vulnerability

- a) Calls for help, alarm and emergency distress
- b) Vocal expressions of physical pain
- c) Individual lament and overwhelm
- d) Collective lament and communal overwhelm

iii. Compassion, Empathy and Supportive Response

- a) Expressions of pity, sympathy and compassion

iv. Cognitive Disruption and Interpretive Reactions

- a) Expressions of forgetfulness, confusion and cognitive disruption
 b) Expressions of irony and astonished reflection
 c) Rhetorical self-defence and hyperbolic protest

v. Moral Regulation and Social Boundaries

- a) Expressions of cursing, condemnation and moral outrage
 b) Expressions of disgust, moral repulsion and social disapproval
 c) Expressions of prohibition and behavioural restraint
 d) Expressive idioms of rejection and protective invocation

vi. Self-Protection and Emotional Defence

- a) Expressions of avoidance, rejection and self-protection

vii. Commands, Control and Social Order

- a) Expressions of command and directive authority

2.1 Positive Emotionality and Social Bonding

a) Expressions of affection, reverence and personal attachment

These expressions show closeness, respect or personal reflection. For example,

(1) **Áádà** [ádà]

'My Father!'

(2) **É àmì** [é àmì]

'O my.' (A reflective expression, neither positive nor negative.)

b) Expressions of awe, wonder and positive amazement

These celebrate beauty, surprise or admiration. For example,

(3) **Wóó** [wóó]

'Wow' or 'Amazing!'

(4) **Éyèè** [éjèè]

'What a pleasant sight' or 'What am I seeing?'

c) Expressions of abundance, sweetness and positive evaluation

These describe richness, pleasantness or high quality. For example,

(5) **Ábùiy àbúiyà** [ábùiy ábúiyà]

'Exceedingly abundant.' (Singular)

(6) **Íbùiy àbúiyà** [íbùiy ábúiyà]

'Exceedingly abundant.' (Plural)

(7) **Íbùiy opàn** [íbùiy ópàn]

'It is plentiful.'

(8) **Ámèmêm** [ámèmêm]

'Sweet or pleasant.' (Used for a story or narration.)

(9) **Ámèmêm** [ámèmêm]

'Sweet.' (Used for taste.)

(10) **Ámèmêm ópàn** [ámèmêm ópàn]

'It is very sweet or very pleasant.'

(11) **Ìmèmêm ópàn** [ìmèmêm ópàn]

'Very sweet or very palatable.' (Used with an uncountable plural noun.)

d) Expressions of joy, celebration and communal solidarity

These types of expressions invite collective rejoicing and mark important life events.

For example,

- (12) **Òkúè òkúè òkúè òkúè... Wòò wòò... Òkúè óó... Wòò wòò... Úú...**
[òkúè òkúè òkúè òkúè wòò wòò òkúè óó wòò wòò úú]

'Join me or join us to celebrate.'

(A joyful call inviting communal celebration, like after childbirth, promotion or achievement.)

- (13) **Eguiny wòbh, ekpo wòbh!** [ègúìŋ wòβ èkpó wòβ]

'Bountiful bunch, bountiful seed!' literally.

This is an emotional expression of joy that the utterer makes over an event that is calls for celebration, like the safe delivery of a woman, where the speaker uses the idiophonic metaphor *wòbh* 'bountiful' to describe the uncomplicated manner both placenta and fetus came out of the womb at during the process of bearing the child. Bunch is the symbol for placenta, while seed symbolizes the newly born child.

2.2 Pain, Distress and Vulnerability

a) Calls for help, alarm and emergency distress

These are urgent calls that invite immediate attention from others. They show the communal nature of crisis response in Abureni society.

- (14) **Éyòò** [éjòò]

'I need help.' (Usually shouted from a distance.)

- (15) **Éyòò... Nà ògígh àmì óó** [éjòò nè ògíγ àmì óó]

'I need help... I am being killed.'

(This means the speaker's life is in danger, like during an attack.)

- (16) **Éyòò... Èmá nà àkún óó...** Ítùè óó [éjòò... èmá nà àkún óó]

'Help... come urgently.'

(The situation requires immediate attention from everyone, for example when a quarrel has escalated.)

- (17) **Àdùgh ná ábhìn àmì** [àdũγ nà áβìn àmì]

'I am in danger' or 'I am overwhelmed by danger.'

- (18) **Ìdìm ná ébhìn àmì** [ìdìm nà éβìn àmì]

'I am surrounded by evil' or 'I feel overpowered by evil forces.'

- (19) **Àmì nà amugh** [àmì nà àmúγ]

'I am finished' or 'I am done for.' (Often used hyperbolically.)

- (20) **Óyè ìdìm è!** [óyè ìdìm è]

'What is this?'

(An exclamation over a sudden negative incident that calls others to pay attention.)

b) Vocal Expressions of Physical Pain

Abureni speakers use certain vocal expressions to signal immediate physical pain. These utterances are spontaneous and instinctive, often produced without conscious thought when the body reacts to sudden or ongoing discomfort. They communicate the intensity of the pain and alert those nearby to the speaker's distress.

- (21) **Áyì** [ájì]

'I feel pain'

This is a vocalised expression of physical pain. It is the spontaneous sound a person makes when they are hurt, such as from a knife cut, a sudden injury or severe ill-health. The expression conveys immediate, sharp discomfort and is often uttered without thought, simply as a natural reaction to intense pain. It reflects the raw, unfiltered way an Abureni speaker signals that their body is suffering.

- (22) **Éyè éyè éyè** [éjè éjè éjè]

'I feel pain, I feel pain, I feel pain'

This expression is also used to voice physical pain, but the repeated form shows that the discomfort is

ongoing rather than momentary. The speaker uses the repeated cry to communicate the persistence or intensity of their suffering. It often draws sympathy from those nearby and naturally prompts the attention of caregivers, since the repeated vocalisation signals that the pain is sustained and distressing.

c) Individual Lament and Overwhelm

Abureni speakers also use certain expressions to voice personal strain when several demands or pressures arise at the same time. These expressions capture moments when an individual feels mentally stretched, emotionally unsettled or unable to cope with competing responsibilities. They communicate a sense of confusion, fatigue and the need for understanding from others.

(23) Ènéń àmì, ènéń àmì [ènéń àmì ènéń àmì]

'Here I am, here I am' literally

This expression is used when the speaker feels pulled in many directions at once. It conveys a state of confusion and emotional overload, as though several situations are demanding attention at the same time. By repeating "Here I am", the speaker highlights their struggle to keep up and signals that they are overwhelmed by competing responsibilities.

(24) Bèbìṅà esì amì t̄á àkpò m̄à am̄um aḍa

[bèbìṅà èsì àmì t̄á àkpò m̄à am̄òm áḍà]

'No breathing space for me to hurriedly sip water!' literally

In this expression also, the speaker acknowledges their confused state over many conflicting goals that they feel overwhelming, scarcely giving them breathing space; "*not even a moment to hurriedly sip water*". "*Not even a moment to hurriedly sip water*" is a figurative conclusion that the speaker employs to win communal empathy and sympathy.

d) Collective Lament and Communal Overwhelm

Abureni emotional language does more than express personal frustration or protest. It also provides ways for the community to acknowledge and share the weight of repeated misfortune. When troubling events occur at the same time or follow one another too quickly, speakers draw on expressions that capture the sense of being overwhelmed by continuous bad news. These expressions act as communal lament, showing empathy, solidarity and a recognition that the community is carrying a heavy emotional load.

A widely used expression in such moments is:

(25) Woo! Na ogba ma idi, idi na eru!

[wòò n̄à ògbà m̄à ídì ídì n̄à èrù]

'Some issues are being discussed, others are emerging.'

This expression is used when distressing events happen together or in rapid succession. It conveys a sense of emotional strain, as though one problem has barely been addressed before another appears. Speakers use it to show concern and shared sorrow, acknowledging that the situation has become overwhelming. It reflects the feeling that the community is facing "an incident too many" and that the burden of these events is becoming difficult to bear.

2.3 Compassion, Empathy and Supportive Response

a) Expressions of pity, sympathy and compassion

These express empathy and shared concern.

For example,

(26) Èkùlòm yàâ [èkùlòm yàâ]

'It is truly a pity.'

(27) Òò Èkùlòm [òò èkùlòm]

'Oh, what a pity.'

(28) Òòlòò [òòlòò]

'What a pity.'

(29) Tó-ó [tóó]

'What a pity.'

(30) **Tò-ô** [tòô]

'It is indeed a pity.'

2.4 Cognitive Disruption and Interpretive Reactions

a) Expressions of forgetfulness, confusion and cognitive disruption

These reflect moments of mental lapses, surprise or uncertainty. For example,

(31) **Éyèè** [éjèé]

'I am forgetting something' or 'I seem lost.'

(Used when trying to recall something.)

(32) **Éyèê** [éjèè]

'Oh, I need help.'

b) Expressions of Irony and Astonished Reflection

Abureni speakers often respond to unexpected or contradictory events with expressions that capture both irony and a sense of wonder. These expressions acknowledge moments when reality unfolds in ways that defy ordinary expectations, prompting reflection on forces beyond human control. They allow speakers to comment on surprising outcomes with a mixture of astonishment, acceptance and quiet humour, while grounding their reactions in shared cultural understanding. For example,

(33) **Éyèè** [éjèè]

'What a pleasant sight' or 'What am I seeing?'

(34) **Éyèlé** [éjèlè]

'What a surprise.'

(35) **Ènàìny àlòghòm ípèsí** [ènàìŋ ɔ̀lòyòm ípèsí]

'Heaven has learnt its own tricks' or "Heaven knows how to produce wonders.'

This expression is used as an exclamation when events unfold in a way that sharply contradicts human expectations. It is often said when something surprising, ironic or completely unforeseen occurs, especially when the outcome challenges what people believe to be the natural or predictable order of things. The speaker uses the idea of "Heaven" mastering tricks to highlight the sense of irony and to acknowledge that forces beyond human control can overturn even the most certain assumptions. It conveys a mixture of astonishment, resignation and reflective humour, and is essentially a way of saying, "What an irony" or "Who could have imagined this?"

A related expression that conveys acceptance rather than lament is:

(36) **Àzìbà àlòghòm ítò!** [àzìbà ɔ̀lòyòm ítò]

'God is perfect in the way he manifests his will.'

This expression is used to acknowledge the perfect will of God, especially in the way blessings or life events unfold. It reflects a calm acceptance of outcomes that lie beyond human control and is often used to appreciate an unexpected but joyful experience. For example, a middle-aged woman giving birth after many in the community had assumed she would never marry or have a child may prompt this exclamation. The speaker uses it to show that divine will can overturn human expectations and bring about an outcome people once thought was impossible.

c) Rhetorical Self-Defence and Hyperbolic Protest

Abureni speakers often draw on vivid, culturally charged imagery when responding to situations in which they feel unfairly judged or denied the chance to defend themselves. These expressions function as rhetorical self-defence, allowing the speaker to protest perceived injustice through exaggerated references to taboo or sacred acts. The hyperbole is not random; it is grounded in shared cultural knowledge about forbidden actions, ancestral spaces, and the consequences of violating them. By invoking such imagery, speakers highlight the severity of the treatment they are receiving and challenge the legitimacy of the

accusation or judgement placed upon them.

One example is:

- (37) **Àmì íkù mà àdìghò ólól kèrê** [àmì íkò mà àdìyò ólól kèrê]
'Did I pluck the sacred watermelon seedling?'

This expression is used when someone feels wrongly accused or prevented from explaining themselves. The speaker questions why they are being treated as though they have committed a grave offence, using the image of plucking a sacred plant to emphasise the unfairness of the situation and to demand the right to speak.

A stronger, more dramatic example appears in:

- (38) **Àmì ígù mà àlàgh dǎ ókàràbh esi àsùár kèrê**
[àmì ígò mà àlày dǎ ókàràβ èsì àsòá kèrê]

'Did I cut down an ancient tree in the cemetery and catch it in the air myself?'

This figurative expression is used when someone feels they have been judged too harshly or condemned without a fair hearing. The speaker questions whether their offence is truly so serious that they deserve such extreme treatment. The imagery draws on a powerful cultural belief that cutting down a sacred, centuries-old tree in the cemetery and trying to “catch” it as it falls is seen as an act of deliberate self-destruction. Such an act is considered both taboo and fatal. A person who dies in this way is not taken home for the usual burial rites; instead, they are buried immediately in the cemetery because their death is treated as a form of suicide linked to sacrilege. By using this imagery, the speaker highlights the severity of the judgement placed on them and protests being treated as though they have committed an unforgivable, self-inflicted offence.

2.5 Moral Regulation and Social Boundaries

a) Expressions of cursing, condemnation and moral outrage

These condemn wrongdoing and call for consequences. For example,

- (39) **Yé-ê** [jéé]

'Damn it!'

- (40) **Òlòò...** [òlòò...]

'Curses, curses...' (A curse directed at the wrongdoer.)

- (41) **Òlòò àléghe ò...** [òlò àlèyè ò...]

'Curses, curses...' (A stronger curse directed at the perpetrator of evil.)

- (42) **Èkèkúà àkúè óò...** [èkèkúà àkúè óò]

'Curses, curses... may it not be well with the perpetrator.'

(Evil should pursue the wrongdoer.)

b) Expressions of disgust, moral repulsion and social disapproval

These mark behaviour or situations that are unacceptable. For example,

- (43) **Fíyà** [fjà]

'Disgusting!' (Used for something repulsive.)

- (44) **Fíyà Ó** [fjà ó]

'Disgusting, and I reject it.'

- (45) **Ìgírìrì** [ìgírìrì]

'Disgusting' or 'Indecent.'

- (46) **Igíriri òbìgh** [ìgírírí óbìy]

'Disgusting to behold.'

c) Expressions of prohibition and behavioural restraint

- (47) **Yàâ** [yáá]

'Stop. Be careful.' (A warning meaning the person should not continue.)

d) Expressive Idioms of Rejection and Protective Invocation

Abureni speakers do not rely only on short exclamations when responding to emotional situations. They also use longer idiomatic expressions that act as protective speech forms. These idioms draw on cultural beliefs, local knowledge and shared understandings of danger and safety. They are spoken when a person wishes to reject misfortune, distance themselves from a threat or affirm their desire for safety. In this sense, they are not simply figures of speech but verbal acts that help the speaker regain emotional balance. The idioms in (48) to (51) illustrate this clearly.

(48) **Gùfíá mà èdí! Èbó óghòghòm!** [gùfíá mà èdí èbó óγòγòm]

'I decry a weeping situation. To the top of the sugar plum tree species.'

(49) **Èbó óghòghòm ò!** [èbó óγòγòm ò]

'To the top of the sugar plum tree species.'

This expresses a rejection of evil or danger.

(50) **Gùfíá mà èdí! Àtígh àmì àtén** [gùfíá mà èdí àtíγ àmì àtén]

'I say no to any weeping situation. Let it pass beneath me.'

(51) **Gùfíá mà èdí! Àtígh àmì àtén! Èbó óghòghòm ò!**

[gùfíá mà èdí àtíγ àmì àtén èbó óγòγòm]

'I reject any weeping situation. Let it pass beneath me and land on top of the sugar plum tree species.'

This final form represents the full meaning of the idiom. It expresses a complete rejection of misfortune and a desire for the danger to be diverted elsewhere. The extended interpretation can be summarised as follows:

No, no! /I take exception or I reject it totally. /Let it pass to oblivion! /

To the top of the sugar plum tree species; not for me.

The *óghòghòm* tree, a species of sugar plum (*Uapaca kirkiana*), is central to the meaning of these idioms. The tree has prop roots and wood that often cracks and produces bright sparks when burning. These physical qualities have shaped a cultural belief that the tree can receive or absorb evil. When utterers of the idiom direct misfortune to the top of this tree, they symbolically remove it from their own lives. This act is understood as safer than allowing danger to settle on human ground. Many native speakers who are familiar with the idiom and the indigenous ecological knowledge associated with it use shorter forms such as *Àtígh àmì àtén*, *Gùfíá mà èdí*, or *Èbó óghòghòm*. These shorter versions act like quick verbal shields. They help the speaker reject fear or uncertainty and restore a sense of control.

2.6 Self-Protection and Emotional Defence

a) Expressions of avoidance, rejection and self-protection

These utterances help speakers distance themselves from misfortune or unwanted involvement. For example,

(52) **Àtígh àmì àtén** [àtíγ àmì àtén]

'Let it pass beneath me quietly.' (The speaker rejects the misfortune being discussed.)

(53) **Amì anì dḡ** [àmì ànì dḡ]

'Count me out. Not for me.' (An expression of firm refusal.)

(54) **Yââ** [yââ]

'Stop. Be careful.' (A warning meaning the person should not continue.)

2.7 Commands, Control and Social Order

a) Expressions of command, prohibition and social control

These help maintain order and prevent conflict. For example,

(55) **Táá** [táá]

'Stop' or 'Stop that.' (Also 'Keep quiet' or 'Do not say it.')

Data Analysis and Discussion

Data Analysis

The fifty-five emotional expressions documented in this study are grouped into seven umbrella themes to show how different aspects of emotional life are expressed in Abureni. Each expression has already been presented with its meaning and cultural nuance, and the table below brings them together by showing how many expressions fall under each theme, using head phrases for ease of statistical presentation. This summary gives a clearer sense of which emotional areas are most central in Abureni speech and highlights the aspects of emotional experience that are most strongly represented within the scope of the dataset.

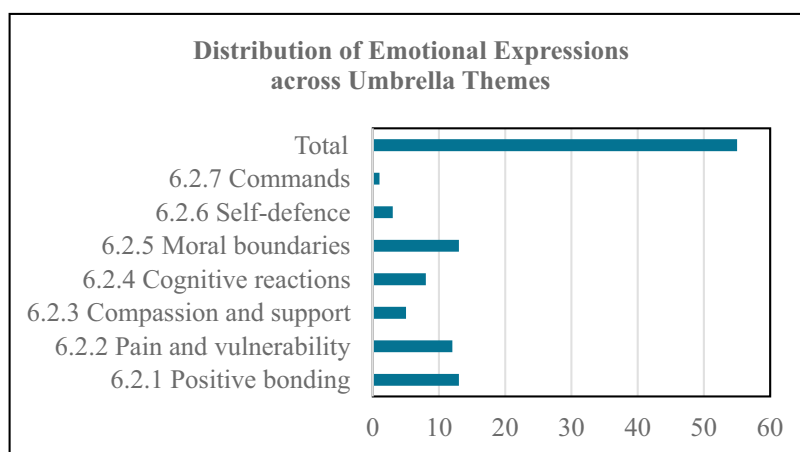


Figure : Distribution of emotional expressions across the seven umbrella themes, showing variation in how Abureni speakers use language to express, regulate and negotiate emotional experience

The distribution in Figure 1 shows that emotional expressions in Abureni cluster are most densely around Positive bonding and Moral boundaries, each with thirteen expressions. This suggests that emotional language plays a central role in strengthening social cohesion and regulating communal ethics. Expressions relating to Pain and vulnerability also appear frequently, reflecting the cultural importance of shared suffering and collective support during hardship. In contrast, Self-defence and Directive control contain fewer expressions, indicating that while these functions exist, they are less elaborated in everyday emotional communication. Overall, the distribution highlights the prominence of relational, moral and communal concerns in Abureni emotional life, reinforcing the argument that emotional expression in the language is deeply tied to social well-being and collective identity.

Discussion

The dataset reveals a highly nuanced emotional lexicon in Abureni, showing that emotional expression in the language is at once linguistic, cultural and therapeutic. The range of expressions, from joy, reverence and awe to pain, alarm and moral regulation, demonstrates that emotional language is deeply embedded in communal life and psychosocial well-being. These expressions function not only as descriptive forms but also as performative acts that organise social relationships, regulate emotional states and reinforce collective identity. This supports both the Linguistic Relativity Theory and the Expressive Theory of Language and Emotion, which argue that language shapes emotional experience as much as it reflects it. Phonology, tone and prosody play a central role in emotional meaning. Tone-marked expressions such as *Áádà* 'My father!' and *Éyèè* 'What a pleasant sight' show how tonal contours carry affective force, allowing

speakers to project reverence, admiration, surprise or reflective awe. These acoustic features highlight that emotions in Abureni are conveyed not only through lexical choice but through layered sound patterns that heighten emotional resonance and create shared understanding.

Across the themes, emotional expressions also encode cultural scripts for responding to life events. Positive expressions such as Wóó 'Wow!' and Ámèmêṃ ópàn 'It is very sweet or pleasant' emphasise relational bonding, shared joy and communal celebration. In contrast, urgent calls such as Éyòò 'I need help' and Àḍùgh ná ábhìn àṃì 'I am overwhelmed by danger' show how emotional language mobilises collective responsibility during crisis. These utterances act as social cues that activate support networks, reflecting the cultural understanding that emotional well-being is a communal concern.

Expressions of individual and collective overwhelm, such as Ènén àṃì, ènén àṃì 'Here I am...' and Woo! Na ogba ma idi, idi na eru! articulate psychological strain in ways that invite empathy and shared lamentation. They reveal culturally embedded mechanisms for managing emotional overload, validating personal distress while placing it within a collective experience of hardship. This aligns with wider African traditions in which emotional balance is restored through shared acknowledgment rather than private introspection.

Several expressions function as therapeutic speech acts, particularly those that express rejection, protection or moral realignment. Idioms such as Gùfíá mà èdí! Àtígh àṃì àtén! 'I reject any weeping situation; let it pass beneath me' serve as linguistic tools for resisting emotional or spiritual harm. Rooted in indigenous ecological knowledge, including the symbolic significance of the óghòghòṃ tree, these idioms reflect culturally grounded strategies for resilience. They operate as protective affirmations that allow speakers to redirect misfortune and regain emotional balance, showing that Abureni emotional expressions often function as therapeutic performances that affirm agency and support psychological stability.

Moral and regulatory expressions further illustrate the role of emotional language in shaping social order. Curses, admonitions and warnings express negative emotions while maintaining moral boundaries and communal ethics. Hyperbolic protest expressions involving sacred or taboo imagery, such as references to plucking a sacred seedling or cutting down an ancient tree, show how emotional language draws on cultural knowledge to negotiate fairness, assert innocence or challenge unjust treatment.

Overall, the Abureni emotional lexicon reveals a complex interplay between linguistic structure, cultural worldview and psychosocial function. The expressions act as tools for emotional interpretation, interpersonal communication and communal healing. They show how language serves as a living repository of indigenous therapeutic practices, embedding emotional care within everyday speech.

Conclusion

This study has shown that emotional expressions in Abureni are important tools for communication and healing within the community. They help people express how they feel, ask for support, and reject danger or misfortune. They also help to maintain social harmony and guide moral behaviour. The emotional vocabulary reflects Abureni cultural values and shows how emotional wellbeing is shared across the community rather than handled alone. The findings support the idea that language shapes emotional experience, as suggested by the Linguistic Relativity Theory. They also support the view that language can influence and transform emotions, as described in the Expressive Theory of Language and Emotion.

The Abureni emotional lexicon contains valuable cultural knowledge about resilience, support, and psychological care. Because the dataset is drawn from real-life interactions, the expressions already show how emotional language functions in natural Abureni settings. They demonstrate how speakers use language to cope with hardship, celebrate success, maintain social order, and support one another during emotionally demanding moments.

It is anticipated that future work may continue to record these natural situations as they occur so that more

examples can be documented over time. This will help deepen our understanding of how emotional language supports wellbeing, strengthens identity, and reflects the everyday lived experiences of the Abureni people.

References

- Ahmad, I. S., Dudy, S., Belay, T. D., Abdulmumin, I., Yimam, S. M., Muhammad, S. H., & Church, K. (2025). Exploring cultural nuances in emotion perception across 15 African languages. arXiv. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2503.19642>.
- Daniel, C. E. (2017). A history of Iduma from ancient times. Onyoma Research Publicatin, Eberhard, D. M., Simmons, G. F., & Fennig, C. D. (Eds.). (2021). *Ethnologue: Languages of the world* (24th ed.). SIL International. <https://www.ethnologue.com>.
- Emenanjo, E. N., & Ndimele, O.-M. (2024). *Communication and language arts*. M & J Grand Orbit Communications Ltd.
- Etire, D. (2015). *The orthography of the Abureni language*. Onyoma Publications.
- Etire, D. (2017). *Onu Abureni : Inuema, Oba na Asor – Abureni Poetry, Expressions, Folktales and Lyrics*. Onyoma Publications.
- Etire, D. (2020). A Documentation of Abureni Song Poetry. In E. Udoh & G. Ekpo (Eds.). *Language Documentation and Description in Nigeria: A Festschrift in honour of Prof. Imelda Icheji Lawrence Udoh at 60* (pp 230-231). Mida Communications Technologies.
- Etire, D. (2023a). A wordlist of Abureni on illnesses, diseases, and global pandemics. *Journal of the Linguistic Association of Nigeria*, 27(1–2). <https://doi.org/10.60787/jolan.vol27no1&2.397>.
- Etire, D. (2023b). The therapoetic use of disaster-inspired song-poetry at an Abureni funeral. *Therapoetics: An International Journal of the Humanities*, 1(1), 158–180.
- Etire, D. (2024). Abureni Ideophones and the determination of meaning and atmosphere. *Therapoetics: An International Journal of the Humanities*, 3(1), 32-48.
- Lindquist, K. A., Satpute, A. B., & Gendron, M. (2015). Does language do more than communicate emotion? *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 24(2), 99–108. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721414553440>
- Lucy, J. A. (1997). Linguistic relativity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26, 291–312. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.26.1.291>.
- Paul, E., Etire, D., Edoghotu, S., Ibote, O., & Obolo, E. (2023). Partnership in indigenous language documentation and advocacy: Experience from the Abureni Language Project. *Journal of the Nigerian Languages Project*, 4, 69–92. <https://jnlp.com.ng/index.php/home/article/view/33>.
- Ponsonnet, M. (2022). Emotional linguistic relativity and cross-cultural research. In G. L. Schiewer, J. Altarriba, & B. Chin (Eds.), *Handbook on language and emotions* (pp. 1032–1061). De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110670851-017>.
- Reilly, J., & Seibert, L. (2003). Language and emotion. In R. J. Davidson, K. R. Scherer, & H. H. Goldsmith (Eds.), *Handbook of affective sciences* (pp. 535–559). Oxford University Press.
- Robert, P. (2019). *History of Emago Kugbo*. Perefortune Printing Ventures.
- Schwarz-Friesel, M. (2015). Language and emotion: The cognitive linguistic perspective. In U. M. Lüdtke (Ed.), *Emotion in language: Theory – research – application* (pp. 157–173). John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ceb.10.08sch>
- Shablack, H., & Lindquist, K. A. (2019). The role of language in emotional development. In V. LoBue, K. Pérez-Edgar, & K. A. Buss (Eds.), *Handbook of emotional development* (pp. 451–478). Springer Nature Switzerland AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17332-6_18.
- Thornley, B. (2024). Study finds strong link between place, language and wellbeing for First Nations communities. ANU School of Literature, Languages and Linguistics. <https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/news/study-finds-strong-link-between-place-language-and-wellbeing-first->

[nations-communities.](#)

Zhang, J., Wu, C., & Meng, Y. (2025). How language shapes emotional facial expression perception: An ERP study on the role of emotion word type. *Experimental Brain Research*, 243(66).

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00221-025-07013-y>