

A Stylistic Analysis of Inter-female Relationship in Onwuchekwa's *Chinagorom*

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Abstract

In oral and written literature, as well as the society, it is attested that the relationship between women is usually characterized by rivalry. Previous studies (Ezeigbo, 1993, Erwierloma, 2001, Sy, 2008) have been carried out on this notion based on novels written in English, but not much have been done on the issue of inter-female relationship based on novels written in the Igbo language medium. Consequently, the present study undertakes a stylistic examination of women-to-women relationship in Onwuchekwa's Chinagorom. This is with a view to delineating the literary techniques used to portray female characters, inter-female hostility, and inter-female bonding. The textual analysis reveals that, the author used idiomatic expressions and fitting names to portray female characters both positively and negatively. The protagonist, Chinagorom was presented as a married woman with strong moral convictions, unlike other women, while the antagonist, Ajughiekwu was epitomized as a villain. With respect to female hostility, the author used suspense as a technique to show that indeed, women are their own worst enemy, as some women (Ajughiekwu, Ekemma, Nweke) aimed at pushing Chinagorom out of her matrimonial home, based on the unproved belief that she committed adultery. In terms of female bonding, the author exemplified solidarity, sisterhood and friendship among women; Chinagorom mother in-law, Uloaku, unusually stood behind her daughter in-law despite the suspicion that she committed adultery, while Dr. Ayodele encouraged Chinagorom to further her education for her own good and also to secure her marriage. On the whole, the author made an unbiased and realistic portrayal of her female characters. The degree of inter-female hostility was high, while the degree of inter-female bonding was low. This is an admission and confirmation of the notion that women are more rivals than friends. It is recommended that women should close gaps and unite to resist the male-created patriarchy that dominates them.

Keywords: Igbo literature, inter-female rivalry, sisterhood, Onwuchekwa.

Introduction

The depiction of gender in literature coupled with the portrayal of character is, to a large extent influenced by the gender of the writer. Over the years, male writers, who dominated the literary space presented mainly male protagonists with sterling qualities and presented women as mere foils to the men in African literature. This lopsided order is a realistic reflection of the patriarchal African culture that positions the man at the helm of affairs. The trend eventually acted as a stimulus to female writers to emerge, rewrite or reconstruct the image of the female in literature. The emergence of the female writer was mainly anchored on the need, not necessarily to challenge the male writer but to fill the gaps by spotlighting the woman who had all the while been striding under the shadow of the man in male written works. It is therefore left to the female writers to show the world the real picture of the woman in their own estimation especially with regards to family and societal roles, challenges and relationship patterns.

With respect to the position of the female writer, Ewrierloma (2001) posits that, as a member of the society, the female writer has the prerogative of portraying her woman to suit her authorial objectives coupled with the right to present her female characters as aggressive,

assertive, or docile and submissive. To a considerable extent, depiction of women in literature by female writers is different from that presented by their male counterparts. Where male writers mainly present women with negative tendencies, female writers present mainly women with positive attributes. One of the major concerns of writers, irrespective of sex is social relationship involving men and women. Of particular interest to this study, is the later, around which various opinions and beliefs have been constructed. Inter-female relationship in life and literature is about how women socially relate with one another. It is about how women bond with one another in friendship and how they war with one another in enmity. These two extremes of experience remain the prevailing pattern of inter-female relationships.

One of the significant outcomes of patriarchy is the role accorded the sexes based on social conditioning. Since women live in a patriarchal system and are controlled by it, they live out their lives according to the imposed roles. Consequently, there are beliefs, stereotypes and myths associated with each gender. One of the ideologies is that women do not like one another. It is generally held that men relate better among themselves than women; as a matter of fact, it is commonly expressed that women are their own worst enemy. This belief is found in folklore, maxims and African Proverbs and it is so entrenched that even women admit it as a fact of their existence. Although this myth is a product of men's patriarchal machination (Ezeigbo 1993) it is sustained and given life by women by virtue of their actions or inactions to their fellow women. When most interactions involving women is riddled with antagonisms, recriminations and hostilities, it is difficult to question, contest or dispute the notion. Rivalry is an apt term used to describe the frosty relationship between women. This lifestyle of female rivalry seems to manifest in many traits like home, business, and in virtually every space where women interact with one another (Wilentz, 1992).

According to Gordons (2005) women complete, compare, undermine and undercut one another and that is the prevailing feature of their interaction, thereby making the exception noteworthy. It is also worthy of note that a major factor that brings women into sustained contact with other women is marriage and the home. In this setting, the new wife is literally surrounded by hyena-like women such as the mother-in-law, the sisters-in-law, the co-wives (other women married to the man's relations in the compound or other wives married by the man) who have been there before her, and even the entire village womenfolk. To the other women, the new wife is a "welcome" intruder into the household and all interactions with her is done with caution while all her activities is viewed with suspicion. To the new wife, the other women are busybodies and nose-pokers who interfere in her private life. As a result, the new wife is always scheming and plotting how to establish herself in her husband's house and dominate it while the other women are busy scheming and plotting how to neutralize her presence and possibly weed her out. All she needs to do to stir the hornet's nest is to put one foot wrong or to make one innocent mistake and she will see the real colour of the other women. Every issue, irrespective of the size is hijacked and used for mudslinging, backbiting and complaint. Some of the usual issues range from the insignificant, like mere sweeping of the compound, to the significant like the inability to have a child or a male child. Evidently, inter-female relationship in the home is akin to two boxers thrown into a ring to fight; they usually take some time to size up each other. It is only a matter of time and they join the battle and hit each other.

The strange fact about female rivalry is that women know that the society expect them to compete and fight, but it is only on few occasion that they have attempted to prove the society wrong. However, the fact of female rivalry does not discount the fact of female bonding, solidarity, friendship and camaraderie. Although rivalry is found to be more pervasive, friendship between women is also a fact evident in the society and reflected in literature. Therefore, the female writer's mission to reconstruct the distorted image of women in literature implies that she is duty bound not just to provide a realistic and balanced account of female

relationships but also to front more positive relationships between women and more female characters that are not roundly evil. This is essentially because, from the female perspective and experience, the female writer is in pole position to advance reasons underlying female frictions and such reasons may have the effect of boosting understanding of the female specimen and possibly moderating the way they are seen by the society.

It is against this background that this study focuses on the type of relationship that exists among women in Onwuchekwa's *Chinagorom*, a female-written Igbo novel. This is with a view to examining the style used by the author to portray her female characters, showcase positive inter-female relationship or female bonding, and negative inter-female relationship or female rivalry.

The Concept of Stylistics

Stylistics has been conceived as the scientific study of style and techniques of writing. Simply put, style is the way or manner of doing something like writing or speaking, although technically the term is used exclusively in relation to the literary text (Eyo, 2005). According to Leech and Short (2007), style is the way in which language is used in a particular context, by an individual, for a particular purpose. On the basis of this, they define stylistics as "the linguistic study of style and the study of language as used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions" (2007:11). This is a suggestion that stylistics is a science underpinning both language and literature. They also opine that the primary concern of stylistics is literary language that is the relation between style and literary and aesthetic functions. As a result, when we talk of style, we refer to what is pervasive and recurrent in a text; it is this recurrence of a particular linguistic feature or perspective that makes the work unique and distinguishes the writer from others. The style therefore represents the distinctive signature of the writer that gives him an identity of his own.

In practical terms, Berhanu (2009) views stylistics as a system of selecting and combining words in the course of writing a fictional work. In other words, it denotes the writer's choice of words and the way such choices are structured in sentences and longer units of discourse, to achieve the writer's objectives. This is to say that every analysis of style is an attempt to find the artistic principles and features that underlie a writer's choice of language. Simpson (2004) posits that analysis in stylistics involves a range of general language qualities including diction, sentence patterns, structure and variety, imagery, arrangement of ideas and other cohesive patterns. All these elements combined contribute to the total aesthetic value of a work of art. From the above viewpoint, it can be said that stylistics basically involves the writer's choice of words or the way he chooses to configure words in the literary text. At the background of choice is the freedom of the writer to use language in a way that suits his narrative and projects his characters, depending on the genre and form.

However, since the writer does not exist in a vacuum, it is deemed necessary to have knowledge of the cultural context in which he operates. To understand his work, there must be an understanding of the myths, assumptions, and the overall cultural heritage which colours and influences his work. According to Eckert and Richard (2001), in some instances, the key to an obscure passage or to an important aspect of the writer's thought may be found in an odd corner of intellectual or cultural history. Thus, irrespective of the primacy of the text in stylistic discourse, the culture in which it is situated plays a part in appreciating the language used in the literary form. In this study, Onwuchekwa's theme of inter-female rivalry and bonding will be examined with a focus on the literary techniques she used to realize the themes.

Literature Review

A good number of researches have been carried out in inter-female relationship, both in fiction and non-fiction. This review will comprise of novels written by Igbo about Igbo irrespective of the language used. In fiction, the positive female character is contrasted with a negative female character and the acceptance of the positive female character represents society's corresponding rejection of the traits embodied by her rival (Johnston, 2014).

In *The Reign of Wazobia*, Onwueme presents both inter-female bonding and inter-female rivalry. In terms of female bonding, the author presents a female protagonist who is the Regent of Ilaa who assumed so much political power and clout that she emasculated the male subjects and reduced them to mere onlookers instead of participants in the government of the land. During her reign, Wazobia attempts to change some aspects of the Ilaa customs and traditions she thought oppressed women such as the rights of widows, domestic chores reserved exclusively for women, and the arbitrary beating of wives by their husbands. Incidentally her mission elicited stiff opposition from the men of the land who construed it as an abuse of power. Faced with the confrontation from the men, Wazobia did not fight alone; her fellow women rallied around her in support. Consequently, when the men attempted to use force to dethrone her, they were confronted by Wazobia and her female supporters and defeated. In terms of female rivalry, although Wazobia enjoyed the support and encouragement of her fellow women, she also received opposition from her fellow women. As soon as Wazobia ascended the throne of Ilaa as the regent king, the women were the first to complain. One of the female characters named Bia doubted the ability and capacity of a woman to rule the land of Ilaa. Bia complained that Wazobia is too weak to rule the land merely because she was not married. According to her "A woman without a husband is like piddling without wrap which feasts the eyes but which no one longs to have". She used this comment to buttress the fact that a woman needs a man to function properly in the society and without a husband a woman is without substance and can achieve little or nothing. Bia's opinion is based on the patriarchy-influential culture in Africa to which she cedes.

Furthermore, in the narrative, a female character, Omu also opposed the regent king by trying to frustrate her mission of freeing women from the bounds of tradition. Omu stands for the old culture and so was one of the upholders of the rigid traditional laws that oppressed women. Wazobia's attempt to liberate widows from the torture of numerous funeral rites was vehemently resisted by Omu who refuses "to be party to the death of tradition". Despite Wazobia's posture, Omu asked the widows and women to prepare for the traditional rituals conducted to mourn the dead king. Additionally, the author portrayed women as betrayers of one another. One of the female characters, Anehe, stood against a woman ruling the land of Ilaa. In her opposition, though, she put on a mask of loyalty thus deceiving the regent that she was on her side. She feigned submission to the regent but at her back plotted her downfall. She became a willing tool in the hands of the men to dethrone her fellow woman. In the course of sending Anehe to poison the food meant for Wazobia, Iyase, one of the male plotters suggested "be careful, you know that your fellow women can easily betray you".

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ezeigbo, like Onwueme, presents sets of female characters with positive and negative attributes and who exemplified female bonding and female rivalry. The characters that showed female friendship and camaraderie were Auntie Chito and Miss Miriam Taylor. Auntie Chito, Raymond's wife acted as a surrogate mother to the female protagonist, Ginika throughout the narrative. Auntie Chito provided a home for the motherless Ginika and thus compensated for the loss of Ginika's biological mother. Apart from the support, Auntie Chito stayed with Ginika all through her personal crisis which includes the rape by a military officer, the forced eviction from her matrimonial home, the death of her only sibling, Nwakire and her husband Eloka on the same day. The love and moral support provided by Auntie Chito

was what eventually healed Ginika. In the same vein, Miss Taylor, Ginika's secondary school teacher fell in love with Ginika and provided her assistance and encouragement during the time she was going through the trauma of rape. On the contrary, Ezeigbo also highlighted female rivalry by pitting a mother-in-law, Akunnaya against her daughter-in-law, Ginika. The root cause of the altercation between the two women was fertility. Akunnaya, Eloka's mother, did not understand why Ginika, Eloka's wife did not take in before Eloka joined the Biafran army during the Nigerian Civil War. Despite the reason advanced by Ginika, Akunnaya blamed her and accused her of having no intention of conceiving children. Throughout the narrative, Akunnaya was a thorn in Ginika's flesh and Ginika was infuriated about her mother-in-law's interference in her matrimonial home. The climax of the rivalry was that Ginika was pushed out of her home when she became pregnant after a rape by an acquaintance.

Aside these novels written by women, other non-fictional accounts and investigations reveal the fact of both female bonding and rivalry. Sy (2008) stressed that female friendship helps women counter the effects of patriarchy as well as providing them with comfort, security and healing. She described female friendship as a non-sexual relationship between women predicated on giving and receiving moral and emotional support, sharing experience, caring and nurturing one another. In corroboration, Hudson-Wesmus (2004) defines female bonding as follows: This particular kind of sisterhood refers specifically to an asexual relationship between women who confide in each other and willingly share their dreams. Enjoying understanding and supporting each other, women friends of the sort are invaluable to each other. Within such love trust and security, it is difficult to imagine any woman without such a genuine support system as that found in genuine sisterhood (65-66).

Hudson-Wesmus' submission is that women do not have the natural capacity to stand alone in times of crisis, hence they have to bond with other women and lean on them for support. In the African context, however, sisterhood is seen differently. Oyewunmi (2003) argue that in many African societies there is no sisterhood without motherhood and the most profound sisterly relations are to be found in co-mothering which in the essence of community building. In addition, this social practice is not restricted to biological motherhood but goes beyond it. This in essence implies that sisterhood embraces all women in the community who have the obligation of taking care of all children in the land. However, Sy (2008) opines that in Africa, female solidarity is plagued by certain structural problems because women are expected to move into their husband's homes where they encounter other women like sisters-in-law and other female relations. These women do not always co-exist in peace and often engage in rivalry, in order to safeguard their position in the family. According to Gordons (2005), a literature review undertaken by Tracy Vaillancourt in 2013 revealed that women by and large express direct and indirect aggression toward other women, and the aggression is a combination of two factors, self-promotion, which amounts to making themselves look more attractive, and the derogation of rivals, that is bringing other women down.

Tanenbaum (2002:47) states that "many women compete over things they think men value, such as looking sexy. The most damaging outcome of this is self-hatred; girls and women disparage themselves and disassociate from other female". The incidence of dissociation is seen by other scholars as a threat to female bonding and solidarity. Sy (2008) submits that: Although some women cultivate sisterhood, other women's hostile attitude toward each other represents another threat to female friendship. Not all women believe in the principles of female solidarity. This attitude may result in violent and destructive conduct toward other women. Rivalry does exist and often keeps women in a battle ground in which animosity and competition are the rules, rather than bonding and solidarity.

It should be understood that Sy's (2008) battle ground is not limited to the home front but extends to every sphere where women operate. Rindflersch (2000) posits that research in the U.S.A in the 1970's revealed that in business many successful women had more difficult relationships with other women than men. Additionally, Dibson and Iredale's (2006) research provides insight into women's prejudice against women in the workplace. One of their studies found that female managers were significantly more likely than men to discriminate against female employees. They also found that in the case of application for promotions, women were more likely than men to assess female candidates as less qualified than their male counterparts. In an empirical study, Barash (2006) sought to know the role women's rivalry played in their lives, and experience as both targets and perpetrators of female envy. Her study revealed that, women's colleagues, best friends, and sisters stole their boyfriends and husbands; women's fear of rivalry by other women was so strong that they chose to live in small towns with fewer people in order to have less competition; married women avoided certain places because they don't want their husbands to meet too many single, beautiful women. Although Barash (2006) knew that female rivalry was a theme in many women's lives, she emerged from her research with a feeling that it must be a theme in every woman's life. The notion of inter-female rivalry is corroborated by Tanenbaum (2005) who states that competition between women is a fact with a history of function that does not benefit women, from diets to dating, from the boardroom to the delivery room.

Weinger et al (2006) examined female rivalry in Cameroonian folktales and submitted that the narratives illustrate rivalry among women as a weapon to maintain the structure of power dominated by men. The female character in these tales bestride the two moral extremes of good and evil and so the regular motif in some of them involve the virtuous woman who maintains the socio-cultural order in contrast with the evil woman who upsets the social order. According to the authors, the narratives showcase women as rivals and enemies of one another given the tendency to backstab blackmail and betray one another. They stress that rivalry between women is supported by the apparent division of women into two categories, good and evil; whereas the good woman always wins in the end, the evil woman always reaps her own destruction. Weinger et al (2006) contend that a dichotomous polarization of this nature obstructs women's development of rapport and coalition and entraps women in a complex web of gender relations that divide them and obstruct them from uniting around common issues of oppression.

Analysis

In this section, the thematic concern of inter-female relationship in the novel will be analyzed with attention to the following: the style adopted by the author to depict female characters, inter-female hostility and inter-female friendship.

The Depiction of Female Characters

It is expected that female writers should present female characters with saintly dispositions in their novels; this is especially for the purpose of adjusting the diagonal inclination of male writers in Africa who present a distorted image of the female in their novels. In this novel, there is a realistic disparity in the presentation of female characters; on the one hand is the protagonist and hero Chinagorom and on the other hand is the antagonist and villain Ajughiekwe. The character, Chinagorom, around whom the story revolves, is epitomized as the ideal and complete woman; one of her sterling attributes is fidelity or moral excellence. The author used idiomatic expressions to describe her moral deportment. In contrast with other immoral women who philander despite the dictates of matrimony, Chinagorom is portrayed as morally upright and faithful to her husband. This is captured in the following description.

O jighi ukwu ebie okazi dika umuagboghọ ibe ya ji nke ha ebie 'she does not use her waist to chop *okazi* as other young ladies do'. The author deploys this idiomatic expression to compare

the lifestyle of Chinagorom and other women. The use of the *Okazi* leaf is symbolic in the context of immorality or illicit sex. In Igbo material culture, the *Okazi* leaf is one of the most common vegetables used in soup preparation. But unlike other vegetables, the *Okazi* leaf is hard and thus requires a very sharp knife to chop it; therefore, the metaphorical use of the waist (*ukwu*) as a knife is suggestive of the fact that many women are sex perverts or people with uncontrolled sex drives. The exception or one of the exceptions to that commonality is Chinagorom who does not use her waist as a knife or a lady who is in firm control of her natural passions. It is instructive that Onwuchekwa underscored the immoral lifestyle of Chinagorom's contemporaries; by highlighting the moral virtues of Chinagorom, she inadvertently discredits and rubbishes the lot of other women.

Aside from her inner quality, Chinagorom is also depicted as physically charming and beautiful. The author used hyperbole to depict the beauty of the protagonist. Through another character (Mrs. Ayodele) the reader gets a glimpse of Chinagorom's beauty when she testified *mma gi mebiri m isi ma ya foduzie di gi* "your beauty ruined my head/senses, not to talk of your husband". The abject valorization and projection of beauty as capable of rendering somebody mad or senseless is a sarcastic and hyperbolic description of unquantifiable and indescribable features. It is sarcastic because it is the opposite of the negative idea of senselessness that is meant. It is hyperbolic because it is an exaggeration of reality meant to underline the fact of physical charm. Furthermore, the author's description of Chinagorom's dancing steps represents her bias for her protagonist.

Ọ na-ete, ọ na-ereji ka aha igu nkwa ka meputari ọhuru... mma ya na etu o si agba egwu na-awu onye ọ bula akpataoyii. O nwere ndi chi ha kpuziri akpuzi nyekwa ha Nganga eji ete egwu obi adi ndi na-elete ha uto.

'While she dances, she swaggers like a palm frond that newly sprouted... Her beauty and her manner of dancing gives everybody goose pimples. There are people who were well created by their personal god and were also given the creativity to dance in a way that delights the onlookers.'

The similar comparison of Chinagorom with a newly sprouted palm frond is indicative of her soft and flexible disposition. An old palm frond is hard and rough, but the new one is soft and pliable. A newly sprouted palm frond is therefore a symbol of flexibility and innocence. The implication of this similarity is that Chinagorom is not a wild or rigid person but a mild and flexible woman. In the same vein, the idea of being crafted by the personal god indicates that a lot of time and effort were expended in the molding and designing of Chinagorom into such an exquisite specimen of beauty. On the whole, we are presented with a character that is endowed with both physical beauty and good character.

The positive qualities of the protagonist are diametrically juxtaposed with the negative attributes of the antagonist Ajughiekwu. Ajughiekwu is portrayed as a troublesome woman. The author chose a name that suits the character of the person bearing it. The name is a derogatory one and the author used it to depict a destructive character, Ajughiekwu. Her name literally means one who wags her tongue without confirming the facts. In other words, her actions are predicated on rumours and hearsay and leads ultimately to trouble. The author provides a vivid description of Ajughiekwu's character, thus *Ajugiekwu bu oku na-enwu enwu na-achokwa onye ga-etinye ya mmanuoku ka o wee mee ire karja* "Ajughiekwu is a burning fire looking for who to add crude oil so that it will burn very well". Fire is a symbol of destruction and disaster. The metaphoric association of Ajughiekwu with not just fire but burning fire is to show her wild destructive nature. Like burning fire that is never satisfied, she has the tendency to destroy until there is nothing left. She possessed an unquenchable and

insatiable appetite for trouble. The use of the phrase *oku na-enwu enwu* (burning fire) is an exaggeration used to depict trouble. In the narrative, Ajughiekwu was consistently troublesome, and her activities provided the spur that moved the story to the climax.

From the foregoing, it could be submitted that the author portrayed her female characters both positivity and negativity given their status and role in the narrative; the protagonist is extremely virtuous while the antagonist is extremely vicious. Aside these characters, the author presented other minor female characters who exhibited varying degrees of positive and negative behavior. It is from this point that the focus of this analysis shifts to the kind of relationship that exists among the female characters and the style used by the author to showcase them.

Inter-female Relationship in *Chinagorom*

The author presented two kinds of relationship among the female characters in the novel. The first kind is characterized by hostility and aggression while the second kind is characterized by friendship and support. In other words, some set of female characters exhibited difference and antagonism while some set exhibited oneness and understanding.

Inter-female Hostility in *Chinagorom*

The author seems to subtly encourage inter-female hostility with her narrative style of suspense. Chinagorom's husband, Dr. Chinedum tactfully agreed with Chinagorom to conceal the fact that it was during his brief trip back to Nigeria (from the United States) that Chinagorom became pregnant. According to him (Chinedum), he wanted to use the situation to assess how women suffer in marriages, especially in the hands of their fellow women. By using a male character as mouth piece, the author strengthens the popular notion and belief that women are their own worst enemies. Due to this tactful concealment, some women in the community represented by Ajughiekwu, Ekemma and Nweke, were fully convinced that Chinagorom had engaged in extra-marital affair that culminated in her pregnancy at the time her husband was away. This secrecy is what set the stage for the fireworks of accusations and suspicions that ensued between Chinagorom, on the one hand and the community women on the other hand. The antagonist, Ajughiekwu was virulent in her belief that Chinagorom's pregnancy was illicit; she indiscriminately expressed her views about Chinagorom's adulterous behavior and thus condemned the innocent woman.

She is of the view that educated women like Chinagorom are shameless philanderers. *Nwanyi mụrụ akwụkwọ nkịta rachara anya ka nwoke na-alu* 'an educated woman whose eyes has been licked by a dog is what a man chose to marry'. A dog licking the eye of a woman is an idiomatic expression used by the author to describe a shameless woman who is capable of committing adultery with impunity. This fact is strengthened by the image of the dog which is believed in Igbo society to represent illicit sex or immorality. Thus to allege or accuse someone of having her eyes figuratively licked by a dog is to label the referent an irredeemable adulterer. As a result of her firm conviction that educated women are wayward, she decided that her three daughters will not go to school, in order to save them from the peril of philandering - *umụ ndinyom atọ ndị m mụrụ agaghị aga skuul ka ha ghara iwa anya iberibe na-eme umụ nwanyi iso ndikom ozo wee gbapụ be di ha* (58) (my three daughters will not go to school to prevent them from the kind of stupid wisdom that makes women to follow other men and run away from their husband's home).

Eventually, Dr. Chinedu returned back to Nigeria from America, and when Ajughiekwu heard it she anxiously expected a showdown between Dr. Chinedu and Chinagorom over the paternity of Chinagorom's baby. She felt that Dr. Chinedu will regret marrying Chinagorom due to the extra-marital affair. In her words:

Ugbu a Chinedum ahula nsu di n'ilu nwanyị mara oke mma ma mụọkwa oke akwukwọ. A sị ya lūrū onye amughị akwukwọ ọ sị na ya chọrọ onye gara kolejị. Ndo, ọ hūla isi ya ugbua.

(Now Chinedum has seen the side effects of marrying a very beautiful and very educated woman. He was advised to marry an uneducated woman, but he said he wanted a woman that had a college education. Sorry, he has seen the end now).

When Ajughiekwe arrived in Chinagorom's house, she saw everybody, but Chinagorom and thought that her husband had driven her away. Little did she know that Chinagorom was bathing. The author mirrored her mind and revealed that she was indeed happy that her evil wish had happened '*ihe ya chere emeela*' (58). Eventually, Chinagorom appeared with her baby after she finished bathing and Ajughiekwu screamed in doubt saying, whose child is this? *Ọbụ nwa onye bụ nke a?* The question is actually meant to be a cue for Chinagorom's husband and the people around to question the paternity of the child. As a matter of fact, it was a rhetorical question calculated to drive home the point that the child was illegitimate. Her remote intention is that Chinagorom had committed an abomination and so should be chased out of her matrimonial home. Incidentally, Chinagorom's calm disposition and indignation showed Ajughiekwu that all was well in her home. Just to save her face, she reluctantly expressed thanks to God for granting Chinagorom safe delivery. Overall, the attitude of Ajughiekwu towards Chinagorom was hostile. Even if Chinagorom's pregnancy was illicit, the least expected of a fellow woman is support and encouragement instead of judgment and public indictment. A woman who knows and cherishes the value of matrimony should not wish that a fellow woman should be driven from her matrimonial home.

Besides Ajughiekwu, there are other women who openly castigated Chinagorom for being "unfaithful" to her husband and thus manifested inter-female hostility. The women are Nweke and Ekemma; until her husband came back from America, Chinagorom continued to bear Nweke's unending *acidic* tongue that Chinagorom is a philanderer. Nweke seized every opportunity to let people know that Chinagorom was sleeping with other men at the back of her husband. In words and actions, Nweke displayed open hostility toward Chinagorom. Like Ajughiekwu, she was eagerly expecting a war between Chinagorom and her husband upon his return, but she was disappointed. '*ihe ọ hūrū abughị ihe o chere ihu, n'ihu na obi ya bụ na Chinedum lọbatala, ọ chụpụ oriakụ ya, di ka nkita na-eri nsi*'. (what she saw was not what she expected to see; she thought that on Chinedum's return, he would chase his wife out of the house like a shit eating dog). The metaphoric description of Chinagorom as a shit eating dog by Nweke revealed her ignoble perception of Chinagorom. Nweke actually saw her as a worthless and useless person. Apart from the association of dogs with sex in Igbo culture, dogs are also used to depict commonness, nothingness, or wretchedness. Thus, Nweke relates to Chinagorom in condescension and devalues her womanhood.

In the end, after the revelation of the truth and vindication of Chinagorom, Nweke was disappointed that her mission was not achieved. She had no option than to revert her previous utterances, thus *...echiche mmadu abughị nke Chukwu. Onu kwuru mma ma nke kwuru njo, ike agwula ha ugbua* (33) (...man's thoughts are not God's. Those who spoke good and those who spoke evil are both tired now). Nweke's utterance is not an indication of remorse on her part, but a tactful means of blending with the happy occasion. According to the author, when she saw that all was indeed well, and the audience were happy, she left in ignominy, *o wee jere ka mmuo isi akika wee lawa* (33) (she walked away like a spirit with disheveled hair). The description of Nweke as *mmuo isi akika* (a spirit with disheveled hair) is a hyperbolic construct meant to buttress the height and degree of Nweke's evil nature. In Igbo folklore, a spirit of this nature is considered abnormal, and usually featured as worse than other normal spirits in action and manners. Thereafter, the author mirrors her thoughts as she decides to mind her business

and seize from interfering in matters that did not concern her, thus, *o wee bido ubochi ahu wee kpebie n'ime onwe ya na ya ga-amuru ako out ya si etutupu afo n'okwu agbasaghi ya na ikusa asirimaasi na-emeghieme* (33) (she decided within her that henceforth she would learn her lessons about how she jumps into matters that does not concern her, and gossiping about things that did not happen). Nweke's thought is a personal indictment, as well as a personal admission that women like her are trouble makers and antagonists of their fellow women. The author also revealed her authorial stance as an omniscient narrator, by chastising Nweke and admonishing her to mind her business henceforth, *Nweke, bido taa muo ijikota ire gi, ka I ghara iga mkporo ihe imaghi isi na odu ya* (34) (Henceforth Nweke, you should learn how to hold your tongue, so that you will not go to prison over what you know nothing about). The author's stance strengthens the idea that women possess an unbridled tongue that can lead them into trouble.

On her part, Ekemma advised Chinagorom to pack from her husband's house and go back to her parent's house. She also shared Ajughekwa's view that educated women are shameless harlots and used the same idiomatic expression of a dog licking the eyes to strengthen her position that Chinagorom was an adulteress. As an omniscient narrator, the author revealed Ekemma's thoughts and wishes for Chinagorom '*o si na Chinagorom ga-eji anya ya hu nti ya mgbe di ya lotara*' (He thought that Chinagorom will use her eyes to behold her ears when her husband returned). The idiom of beholding one's ears with one's eyes is used to suggest extreme hardship or agony. That means Ekemma expected that given the degree of Chinagorom's 'offence', her husband will subject her to extreme torture upon his return.

On a different occasion, Ajughiekwu demonstrated hostility towards another female character named Alaezi. The occasion was the assembly of women in Chinagorom's house which demanded that kolanut be offered and shared as tradition demands. Incidentally, Alaezi who broke and shared the kolanut bypassed Ajughiekwu while sharing it among the women. This simple oversight quickly attracted the anger of Ajughiekwu. Her reaction was as caustic as it was lethal. '*Ajughiekwu wee malie elu bigbo Alaezi etu o si kewo ya oke oji*' (Ajughiekwu jumped up in rage and screamed on Alaezi for denying her a portion of the cola nut). The author's use of the word *bigbo* (scream) aptly buttresses the quantum of rage and venom in Ajughiekwu's reaction. It was simply an overreaction; an issue as simple as bypassing a kinsman or kinswoman during kolanut sharing should not have elicited a reaction of that nature. In a gathering of men, such an oversight would be ignored or treated as a joke. For Ajughiekwu to have made it a big issue is an obvious demonstration of the odium and animosity a woman held for another woman.

Furthermore, the author used a male character in the novel to showcase inter-female hostility. This character is Dr. Chijioke, a contemporary of Chinagorom's husband. On the occasion of a meeting at Aba club and Imo hotels, Dr. Chijioke met a couple of women and interacted with them. Thereafter many of those women started writing him love letters for friendship and marriage. '*otutu umunwanyị ndị Dr. Chijioke zutere n'Abba club na n'Imo hotels wee dewere ya leta uto. Ufodu ha na-edeka o buru enyi ha ma ndi ozo na-edekwanu ka o lura ha*' (85) (Many women whom Dr. Chijioke met in Aba club and Imo hotels started writing him love letters; some wrote desiring to be his girlfriends while the others wrote desiring to be his wives). These women expressed uncanny desires of all sorts in their letters, by shamelessly wooing the man into a relationship, undeterred by the fact that Dr. Chijioke was a married man. The implication of this situation is that the letter writing women wanted to be happy at the expense of another woman, the legitimate wife of Dr. Chijioke. The quest to displace another woman in her matrimonial home is the height of inter-female hostility. This is an apparent indication that women do not like themselves.

Inter-female Bonding in *Chinagorom*

Although inter-female rivalry characterized the narrative, the author also featured instance of inter-female bonding and solidarity; surprisingly this bonding involves the relationship between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law that is Uloaku, Dr. Chinedum's mother and Chinagorom, Dr. Chinedum's wife. Uloaku is shown as the epitome of a mother, in word and deed. This is exemplified in Uloaku's defense and support of Chinagorom at the heart of her predicament. Upon the publicity of Chinagorom's pregnancy in the absence of her husband, Dr. Chinedum, Uloaku's husband consulted the native doctor 'Ochaachagbute' and he revealed that Dr. Chinedum was not responsible for Chinagorom's pregnancy. When Uloaku heard about the revelation it was expected that she would draw the battle line and possibly initiate moves to disgrace her and push her away, having committed an abomination, but she did not. Instead, Uloaku stood up in defense of Chinagorom stating that "*Chinagorom bu nwata toro n'ala anyi a. Anyi niile maakwara na o jighi okpa ebie okazi di ka umuagbogho ndi ya na ha tokotara ji nke ha ebie*" (15) (Chinagorom is a child who grew up in this our land. All of us know that she does not use her feet to cut *okazi* like her contemporaries do). By this assertion and testimony, she vouched for Chinagorom's moral excellence and fidelity. Even though her defence of Chinagorom earned her a beating from her husband, she took it in good faith and remained resolute in her belief that Chinagorom was not an immoral woman.

It is instructive to note that, even though Uloaku stood behind Chinagorom, she did not really vouch for her innocence. She lamented that her daughter-in-law had disappointed her by using the proverb, *enwe kwo nwa ya n'azu, o maghi mgbe o ji ghoru utu rachaa* (11) (the monkey carries her baby on her back, but did not know when the baby plucked cherry to eat). The use of the proverb is a pointer that she could not vouch for her daughter-in-law, since such wrongs are possible. At the same time, the use of the proverb featuring a monkey is the author's way of making a distinction between Chinagorom and other women, as far as immorality is concerned. The use of the monkey, and not a dog, in reference to Chinagorom is suggestive of the fact that she is not as immoral as others. In Igbo culture, monkey is not associated with immorality but tact. The idea therefore is that Chinagorom may have committed adultery, not because it was in her nature, but because she was human and needed to satisfy her normal desires, once in a while. Besides, at different times in the narrative, Uloaku says positive things about Chinagorom, like *o bu nwanyi maara obi di ya kwesiri olulu* (57) (she is a woman that knows the heart of her husband that is fit for marriage). The author's projection of the love and support given by Uloaku to Chinagorom is a deliberate attempt to show that women can help alleviate the pain of other women by showing them love in times of difficulty.

Aside Uloaku, another female character in the novel that demonstrated female friendship is Mrs. Ayodele, Dr. Chijioke's office colleague. She likes the progress of her fellow women and so encouraged Chinagorom to further her education for her own good. "*Oriaku Ayodele wee juwa enyi ya nwanyi ihe bu echiche ya maka igulukwu akwukwo gaa n'ihu*" (Mrs. Ayodele then asked her friend what she thought about furthering her education). Mrs. Ayodele did not stop at advising and motivating Chinagorom to further her education, she took practical steps and provided incentives to facilitate the process. She assisted Chinagorom in filing in the registration forms and also bought books for Chinagorom in preparation for the JAMB examination. Mrs. Ayodele's thinking is that if Chinagorom gets more education, she would be in position to compete with other educated women who had their eyes on her husband. This is a woman who was sincerely concerned about her fellow woman's personal development as well as the security of her marriage. A subtle fallout of this solidarity between Mrs. Ayodele and Chinagorom is female rivalry and competition. The idea that other educated women colleagues of Chinagorom's husband had their eyes on him, and that Chinagorom should go back to school to avert that, indexes the fact that beneath the competitive disposition of women is a natural sense of insecurity. This is a confirmation of Gordon's (2005) finding that women

express indirect aggression toward other women by making themselves look more attractive while derogating their rivals; and as women consider being prized by men, their ultimate source of strength, worth, achievement and identity, they are compelled to fight other women for the prize. In other words, when a woman's value is connected to the people who can impregnate them, they turn on one another.

On the whole, both Uloaku's and Mrs. Ayodele's attitude and disposition towards Chinagorom to a large degree cushioned the myth that women are their own worst enemy. At least, if the notion of female rivalry is the rule, there are few exceptions as stated by Gordon (2005). It should be stressed that in the course of realizing her theme, the author employed suspense as a major narrative technique. The author concealed the paternity of Chinagorom's pregnancy as Dr. Chinedum warned Chinagorom not to tell anyone that it was during his brief trip to Nigeria that he impregnated Chinagorom. It was this suspense that set the stage for the inter-female battle royale that ensued.

Conclusion

The author adopted different literary devices to portray her female characters and realize her theme of inter-female hostility and bonding. She used mainly idiomatic expressions and symbols to describe her characters' moral dispositions, or otherwise, coupled with the use of names that fit the mannerisms of the characters. In terms of inter-female relationship, the author used suspense as a catalyst for both inter-female hostility and bonding. It was the hidden information that Dr. Chinedum was responsible for his wife's pregnancy that produced a group of women who attacked Chinagorom, and a solitary mother-in-law that sympathized with her. Additionally, idioms and proverbs were utilized by female characters to vilify another female character in the novel. As a third person narrator, the author often mirrored the minds of her female characters and revealed their inner thoughts and feelings about other characters and situations. The device served to fathom the real mental attitudes of female characters like Ajughiekwu and Ekemma in the course of their angst against the protagonist.

In summary, the author used these literary devices to depict the two extremes of the human psyche. In one extreme were some women's hostile attitude towards their fellow women, and in the opposite extreme, were some women's solidarity with their fellow women. In relation to the first objective of this study, the analysis revealed a low degree of positive inter-female relationship or female bonding and friendship. It was only Uloaku and Mrs. Ayodele that provided support for the protagonist in her period of difficulty; however, the author highlighted the kind of female solidarity that can be termed the most paramount, and that is the love and understanding shared between Uloaku, the mother-in-law and Chinagorom the daughter-in-law. The atypical Uloaku stands in sharp contrast to the archetypal wicked mother-in-law portrayed in folktales, proverbs and novels. In relation to the second objective, the analysis showed a high degree of negative inter-female relationship or female rivalry. There were more women that opposed and fought the protagonist than those that sympathized with her in the narrative. As a matter of fact it was this rivalry that provided the spur that drove the story to its logical conclusion. The rivalry was so strong and pervasive that it almost overshadowed and almost rendered invisible, the exhibition of friendship by other women. In sum, it could be adjudged that inter-female rivalry and hostility is injurious to women's lives and concerns; when women spend their time in bickering and antagonism, they cede power, authority and control to the men, thereby promoting patriarchy, and their own suppression and domination. On the contrary, when women bridge the psychological gulfs that separate them, and come together and become their sisters' keeper, they enhance their potentials in the social space and achieve both personal and societal objectives.

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