

'You're Responsible for His Death': Widowhood in Igbo Gender Construction and Struggle for Agency in Selected Literary Texts

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Abstract

The paper examines the construction of widowhood in the traditional Igbo society where the demise of a spouse makes the partner culpable, especially the female. Using three texts set in the Igbo culture, namely, two stories from Ifeoma Okoye's *The Trial and Other Stories* entitled "Soul Healers" and "The Trial"; and Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo's drama text, *Hands that Crush Stone*, the paper rethinks this facet of gender construction through the lens of systemic functional linguistics. The Transitivity analysis showed the predominant representation of the protagonists in vulnerable social positions as 'carriers' of stigmatizing 'attributes', as 'actors' of incriminating 'goals', as 'receivers' of accusing and dehumanizing 'verbiage', as objects ('hands') and as the wretched of the earth. The Mood system of the clause as exchange shows the widows at the receiving end of interrogative and imperative clauses showing that power structures in the society are skewed in their disfavour. The paper observes the lone struggle of these social victims and the desperate but ingenuous strategies they contrive to gain agency from repressive cultural and social practices. The paper concludes that these literary texts, though set in apparently enlightened fictional Igbo societies, mirror authentic social practices that need to be critically addressed.

Keywords: widowhood, agency, gender construction, systemic functional linguistics, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Literature mirrors human authentic experiences through discourse - language use in speech and writing. Literary discourse functions as medium of expression, of representing experiences, worldviews and enacting social relationships.

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In these functions, discourse enables readers to reflect and act on things in the real world (Halliday, 1978). Linguistic representation of experiences and role relationships is said to be dependent on how people are positioned in the macrostructure with peculiar social hierarchies and power structures which tend to privilege some and disadvantage others. (Fairclough 1995, Van Dijk 2005). The literary texts under study seem to capture social realities about widowhood in Igbo culture with the stance that among those so repressed by contrived dominant discourses are widows. The paper looks at this facet of gender construction in selected literary texts by Ifeoma Okoye (2005) and Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo (2010).

Widowhood in Igbo culture is regarded as a traumatic experience, an experience every married person dreads. This state of affairs, occasioned by death of a spouse leads to loss of spousal intimacy and protection. This paper raises pertinent questions as to why women are in most cases the worst hit and why they are perpetually relegated by many cultures to a position of vulnerability and responsibility for the demise of their partners such that they have to go to great lengths to prove their innocence. Babangida's (1988 in Abdulrazaq 2000:1) assertion may prove that the status quo is not peculiar to the Igbo culture, that widowhood in some other cultures is 'a sordid situation which merely allocates to the widow a position of societal scorn, disdain and permanent membership of the wretched of the earth'

A number of facts prove that widowhood is more excruciating to women than men in some cultures. The following quotations are from widows from parts of Africa and Asia bemoaning their fate as documented by the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women (2001).

- We are considered bad omens. We are excluded from all auspicious events - Lakshmi, Rajasthan, India, Aparajita Newsletter, 1995
- I'm accused of being a witch who killed her husband. - Terezinha, Zambezia Province, Mozambique 1997
- We are treated like animals just because we are widows - Angela, Nigeria, 1999
- I and my children were kicked out of the house and beaten by the brothers-in-law - Seodhi, Malawi, 1994
- My husband died of AIDS, and slept with many women; I'm now dying but his family blames me for his death - Isabel, Kenya, 1996.

These are just a few out of the many voices of widows crying out against social injustice meted out to them after the death of their spouses. The present authors make bold to say that such outcry would be an anomaly for the widowers.

The converse terms of 'widow' and 'widower' in reference to women and men respectively seem to belong to the set of such polar terms where one of the terms serve only nomenclatural functions. This is because widowers do not seem to experience the trauma their female counterparts are made to go through by societal norms and value systems, namely, financial, psychological, sexual and social insecurity. The English word-order would normally place the male first, as in man-woman, hero-heroine; but the female in the widow-widower pair comes first, an evidence in support of the claim that discourse accords more prestige to males than females by the tendency to front females in non-prestige discourses (Wareing, 2000).

This paper will thus focus on the construction of widowhood in the selected literary texts, how widows are regarded as responsible agents in the demise or sordid state of their spouses, the facets of traumatising and trials they are made to face and how they have contrived to fight these social injustices and gain agency through the insignificant discursive resources at their disposal. The following questions were addressed in this study: first, what linguistic features encode widowhood construction regarding spousal demise or fall in the texts under review; second, how have these constructions conferred responsibility on the widow; third, how have these widows in the texts struggled for agency and self-vindication; and fourth, what implications do these findings have for the entire discourse on widowhood practices in the Igbo culture, for gender equality and equity and for critical discourse analysis.

2. Brief Synopsis of the Selected Literary Texts

The three texts selected for the study seem to share similar ideological conceptualization about widows in the Igbo culture. Widows seem to be constructed by the traditional ideological apparatuses as responsible agents in the demise of their spouses. In 'Soul Healers' and 'The Trial', the two stories selected from Ifeoma Okoye's *The Trial and Other Stories*, the protagonists-widows, Somadi and Anayo, were accused of being responsible for their husbands' deaths.

The texts narrated the extent to which the so-called custodians of cultural values could go in imposing this grave responsibility on the widow and the various strategies contrived by these social actors to rid themselves of this heavy load of responsibility for manslaughter and gain their liberty from unmerited social sanctions. The widows and near-widows in the third text *Hands that Crush Stone* by Akachi Adimorah-Ezeigbo also extend this halo of social responsibility that seem to subject them to exploitation and perpetual penury both by social and political actors who regard them as mere 'hands' that provide cheap labour. This third text was selected because of the seemingly systematically instituted social scorn, domination and hegemony by the power elite counteracted by the widows' recourse to the supposed feminine subordinate stereotypes to gain agency: solidarity, intimacy, cooperation, rapport, as against man's aggression, competition, report talk and domination (Malmkjaer, 2002).

The three texts seem to be addressed to women who found themselves in the position of widowhood, a clarion call to exploit their so-called female intuition in the face of repressive widowhood practices. These widow-protagonists were at last vindicated in spite of cultural norms and sanctions, as well as armed aides, bodyguards and soldiers. It may sound absurd the tactics these widows contrive to gain agency, and to prove that 'a goat is not a rodent that one can roast over a small fire'. This seems to be in line with Adimorah-Ezeigbo's 'snail sense feminism' (Adeniji, 2012), where women are enjoined not to use coercion but their natural intuition, soft nature and stereotypic frames to subvert agents of patriarchy.

3. Theoretical Bases

The theoretical premise for the study is hinged on these four research models namely; critical discourse analysis, Halliday's systemic functional grammar, Fairclough's tri-dimensional social theory of discourse and insights from feminism. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) interrogates the themes of dominance, abuse, oppression, repressive ideological positions and hegemony that run through the plot of the three texts selected for the study. The various social practices encoded in the texts about widows seem to position them as the silenced, the vulnerable, the unprotected, the undefended and the helpless in the face of powerful and tyrannical patriarchal, social and cultural forces.

CDA as a politically and socially committed research paradigm which positions itself on the side of the dominated to scrutinize the activities of the powerful (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2005; Wodak, 2005) becomes a useful theoretical model to question these practices encoded in these texts where the widow not only had to suffer deprivation occasioned by death of spouse but also the psychological trauma of being saddled with responsibility for such death by exploitative and avaricious relations and employers of labour.

CDA has proved to be amenable to Halliday's systemic functional grammar (SFG) which studies the meaning of texts in the contexts of their use (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak and Busch, 2004). Halliday's grammar is a grammar of meaning, which resides in the systemic patterns of choice: the potential and the actual choices (Egins, 2004; Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). Halliday identified three meaning potentials or metafunctions which are realised simultaneously in a piece of text: ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions (Halliday, 1973; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004), and claims that 'language is as it is because of the functions it has evolved to serve in people's lives' (Halliday 1978:4). The ideational metafunction is realized by the system of transitivity and specifies the participant roles, process types and attendant circumstances under which the processes are realized. Thus participant-process-circumstance configuration constitute the lexicogrammatical analysis in the transitivity system (Halliday and Matthiessen,2004). The participant roles are realized by the nominal group, process types by the verbal group and the circumstance by adverbial and prepositional groups.

According to Halliday (1973: 39), transitivity relates to 'the grammar of the clause as a representation' of experience and worldviews. Spender (1998) has argued that the world of experience has been represented in male perspectives and the language as it is has not represented adequately the woman's authentic experience. In the same vein, linguistic representation of experience in the Igbo cultural milieu seem to be skewed towards this positive male and negative female representation as seen in the construction of the widow personae in the texts. Similarly, the interpersonal metafunction realized by the Mood system of the clause focused on the clause types used as exchange in the texts and how these clauses - declarative, interrogative and imperative - express the power structures existing between the widows in the texts and the various social and ideological apparatuses.

These two lexicogrammatical features are relevant to this study as they encode the literary artists' representation of authentic human experiences in the texts and the individual and group relationships existing among social actors. The textual metafunction realized by Theme, though interpreted simultaneously with the other two in the clause, may be outside our scope since our concern is not the prominence given to widows in topical theme positions, but to how they are framed in the world of experience and their place in the power macrostructure and role relationships.

Fairclough's (1995:97) social theory of discourse which sees language 'as discourse, discursive practice and social practice' will also inform the description, interpretation and explanation of the meanings captured in the texts about widowhood. Using this framework, the linguistic features that encode these widowhood constructions will be extracted and interpreted in the context of the events in the surrounding text, in this case, the death of a husband and the expectations of the effects on the widow. Thereafter, explanations of the conflicting reactions to this situation by forces in the macrostructure that compound and complicate it will be focussed on as an addition to the current debates in feminism and the place of women in cultural and social spaces.

4. Methodology

The approach in this paper is three-fold: first, to identify the linguistic features that encode widowhood construction, second, to interpret these features discursively as relevant to the Igbo cultural milieu and third, to explain their motivations and implications in that social arrangement. The three texts were selected because they apparently represent a triad that captures typical conceptualizations of widowhood in Igbo culture. For ease of reference, 'Soul Healers' is henceforth labelled Text 1, 'The Trial', Text 2 and *Hands that Crush Stone*, Text 3.

Sample texts were selected from the literary texts and numbered for ease of reference. These were divided into clauses using double slashes where the selected texts consist of more than one clause. The system of Transitivity and Mood in Halliday's systemic functional grammar were applied to the analysis of the clauses. The Transitivity system describes the world of experience in which these widows had to live in and the social actors that bring about the doings and happenings in the life of a widow.

Six process types are identified by Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) in the Transitivity system, namely, material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioural and existential processes. Since the clause is the basic unit of analysis in Halliday's SFG, the analysis will focus on only three clause types that exemplify these processes: material, relational and verbal, because they seem to buttress the conceptualizations of widows in the Igbo gender construction. Material clauses focus on the 'processes of doing and happening' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 179), and how the participants are assigned roles as Actor, Goal/Scope or Beneficiary. Relational clauses which construe 'processes of being' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 210) relate to how the participants are positioned as Carrier of particular Attribute; and verbal clauses also called 'process of saying' (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004: 252-256) relate to who the Sayer is, what was said (Verbiage) and to whom (Receiver).

The Mood system is analyzed to show the position of power, the grammar of the clause as exchange, as a means of assigning social roles and determining relationships (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004). The use of the various clause types: declarative, interrogative, imperative and Mood tags show which of the participants hold dominant social position and how the different clause types serve the social actors in the negotiation of meaning and assigning responsibility. Fairclough's STD also comes in as a handy model to reinforce the view that language as discourse is a veritable tool used by the power elite to institutionalize dominant frames and orders of discourse that are repressive to the disadvantaged group.

5. Analysis

5.1. Analysis of Selected Texts in the Transitivity System

5.1.1. Material Clauses/Processes

In Halliday's SFG, material clauses present participants as Actors whose actions have effect on Goal or Scope over which the action imparts, and attendant Circumstance. (For a detailed reading on Halliday's framework, see Eggins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). We present this Actor-Process-Goal/Scope-Circumstance configuration in the sample clauses below.

The numbers outside the parenthesis are the clauses selected for analysis and they are numbered serially for ease of reference, while the ones in parenthesis are the pages where the clauses could be found in the three texts.

Table 1: Widow as Actor

Texts	Clauses/page	Actor	Process- Material	Goal/Scope	Circumstance
1	1 (9) 2 (10)	Somadi You (Somadi)	caused the death have kidnapped	of her husband these children	by leaving him
2	3 (49) 4 (49) 5 (46)	If you You I	poisoned will die didn't kill	your husband... (a death) my husband	within twenty-eight days
3	6 (5)	Only widows	do	<i>igedu</i> work (slave work)	

In Table 1, the sample clauses position the widow personae as Actors of processes that tend to stigmatize and place them in positions of blame and societal disapproval. This is evident in the data on Tables 2 and 3 where the widow personae suffers unmerited retributions as the consequence of socially abnormal actions as Goal and Recipient (Beneficiary).

Table 2: Widow as Goal

Texts	Clauses	Actor	Process- Material	Goal	Circumstance
1	7 (13) 8 (13) 9 (9)	They (inlaws) They Martha and her siblings	jeered at called had accused	me (Somadi) me a murderer her (Somadi)	of causing the death of her husband...
2	10 (45) 11 (48)	They (<i>Umu-okpu</i>) We	have already condemned will ostracise	me (Anayo) you	if you refuse
3	12 (29) 13 (30)	It (crushing stones) You	has broken treated	our backs us	like the worst of slaves

Table 3: Widow as Recipient

Texts	Clauses	Recipient	Process-Material	Scope	Circumstance
1	14 (13)	I	found	it difficult to live	without seeing my children
2	15 (48)	You (Anayo)	will go	through trial by ordeal	before your husband's burial
3	16 (28)	(You, widows)	leave	the site	if you do not want to work

5.1.2. Relational Processes (Process of Being)

This clause type in Halliday's SFG assigns entities to particular categories based on their attributes. Two types are known in SFG, attributive and identifying clauses (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004:). We are concerned with attributive because it places entities in a class as against identifying that gives an example of a typical member of a particular class. Attributive processes construe the Carrier-Process-Attribute-Circumstance configuration as presented in the table below.

Table 4: Widows as Carriers of Attributes

Texts	Clauses	Carrier	Proc- Rel	Attribute	Circumstance
1	17 (9)	Somadi	is	a murderer	by leaving (her husband) (of her own children) (to her children)
	18 (10)	Somadi	is	kidnapper	
	19 (9)	Somadi	is	liar	
2	20 (49)	Anayo	is	(dealer in poison)	(by poisoning her husband)
	21 (54)	This woman	is	a devil, a murderer	
3	22 (32)	You(Widows)	are	foolish	that we accepted this work
	23 (28)	...because we	are	widows and hopeless	
	24 (29)	We	are	hands that crush stone	
	25 (28)	You	are	wicked and ungrateful	
	26 (29)	You	are	mad	
	27 (30)	You	are	just hired labourers	
	28 (29)	You	become	greedy	
	29 (39)	They	are not	regular workers	
	30 (39)	They	are	casual workers	
				we engage to crush stones when we need them	

5.1.3. Verbal Processes

Verbal processes are clauses that construe saying. They comprise the Sayer involved in the process (verbal), what is said (Verbiage) and to whom (Receiver) (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2004:252-256).

Table 5: Widows as Recipients of Dominant Sayer's Verbiage

Texts	Clauses	Sayer	Process-Verbal	Receiver	Verbiage
1	31 (13)	They(siblings)	said	(to Somadi)	if I had not left...,he wouldn't have died a murderer
	32 (13)	They	called	me (Somadi)	
2	33 (46) 34 (47)	Ezeji Ezeji	is accusing said	you (Anayo) (to <i>Umu-okpu</i>)	of killing your husband Zimuzo you put poison in your husband's food... of poisoning his brother unless Anayo went through the trial
	35 (48) 36 (52)	Ezeji Anayo's mother	has accused threatened to kill	you herself	
3	37 (30) 38 (28)	I (Chief Mbu) I (Chief Mbu)	repeat have said...	(you widows) (to you widows) (Chief Mbu)	go back to work or leave the quarry I'm not adding a kobo to what I pay you for the national minimum wage
	39 (1)	We (widows)	are not even asking	her (Mrs Udenta)	
	40 (7)	I	told	her (to the people)	about my suffering as a widow
	41 (7) 42 (7)	I (as I heard) her	told say	her (to us widows)	about our plight as stone crushers she will better the lives of widows
	43 (8)	Madam Udenta	said		that we should continue with the strike
	44 (8)	She (Udenta)	said		that we should come...for foodstuff

It is worthy of note that the Sayer in most of the clauses in the Table above represent the power symbol of the society. The fact that these power symbols have verbalized a particular process makes it to be held as authentic fact. The verbalizations of widows are either seen as an affront by the representations of power or they are a report of their plight to a higher authority.

5.2. Analysis in the Mood System

The Mood system is the grammar of the clause as a means of enacting relationships in an exchange (Egins, 2004; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). The role relationships are evident in the use of the various declarative, interrogative and imperative clauses used as well as the Mood tags and modal adjuncts. These sample clauses in the texts exemplify this assertion.

Text 1: In Text 1, the interrogations and the modal adjunct 'perhaps' emanate from psychological trauma of self-imposed guilt which the protagonist felt as a responsible agent that share modal responsibility in the death of her husband.

45. //Perhaps her husband would not have died// (p.13)
46. //Perhaps he would have been able to pick up the broken pieces of his finances// (p.13)
47. //What about her own career?// (p.13)
48. //Did she not have a right to self fulfilment?// (p.13)
49. //Could someone else love her children// (p.14)

To Somadi, the interrogations and modal adjuncts depict internal turmoil to come to terms with external forces because in her conscience, 'the doubt and the guilt still lingered after so many months'. The dominant voice of tradition made her stigmatize herself and believe she shares the blame for the death of her husband.

Text 2: In Text 2, the interrogations and imperatives are more copious from the representatives of cultural values symbolized by Ezeji, the male persona, the *Umuokpu* (daughters of the lineage) and Anayo's mother.

50. //Anayo, your brother-in-law Ezeji is accusing you of killing your husband, Zimuzo.// It is our duty to find out// whether this is true or not.//What have you to say for yourself?// (p.46)

51. //Ezeji said// you put poison in your husband's food//... and when he ate the food,// he vomited blood//and died//. (p.47)

We note that this accusation, reiterated on page 47 are the only declarative sentences made by Eletty, the leader of the *Umuokpu*, even after Anayo explained the circumstances surrounding her husband's death which in a qualified doctor's diagnosis was stomach ulcer. The rest are interrogations and commands, following Anayo's vehement denial:

52. //Whoever accuses me of such a crime is wicked...// (p.46)
53. //Watch your tongue, young woman...// (p.46)
54. //Answer our questions and nothing more!// (p.46)
55. //Be rude to us again and we'll deal with you squarely...// You understand?// (p.46)

- 56 //Do you know that people vomit blood// when they eat food with poison in it?// (p.47)
57. //Why would Ezeji accuse you// if you didn't do it?// p.47)
58. //Did you stop your husband from helping his brother financially?// (p.47)
59. //We have our traditional way of dealing with this type of accusation...// Don't we?// (p.48)
60. //And we must abide by it,// mustn't we?// (p.48)

As in Text 1, Anayo was forced into self incriminations by her conscience, trying to figure out where she had erred.

61. //Could she have indirectly contributed to her husband's death?// (p.52)
62. //If I don't go through the trial,// will people believe I killed my husband? (50)
63. //Why should I have killed him?// To take his money//? But he wasn't rich.// (p.50)
64. //To marry another man?// If I don't marry again,// they will know for certain// I didn't kill him.(p.50)
65. //That means// I'll live with the stigma for a long time to come.// (p.50)

Anayo was to experience the most burdensome interrogation from her mother, very direct and unmitigated in spite of her resolve not to be intimidated by the forces of tradition. Anayo's mother's distrust was a serious dent to her struggle for agency.

66. //Anayo, did you poison Zimuzo?// (50)
67. //Everybody will (believe you killed him) //if you don't go through the trial...//What will your father say in his grave?// (p.51)
68. //You will be ostracized...as a husband killer//. (p.51)
69. //Do you know// what that will do to me and to your brothers and sisters?// (p.51)

The turn of the hands of fate in her favour was simply providential. She was alone, abandoned by friends, contemporaries in the university, church members and even her closest family – her mother. . The power structures were turned against her. But for her alertness, gained from a friend's advice, she would have been poisoned by her brother-in-law. Her vindication was final and even her brother-in-law's threats turned out to be empty.

70. //You're not going to inherit the property of a man// you murdered//. (pp.54-55)

Text 3: In Text 3, these clauses in the Mood system exemplified role relationships as shown in the interrogatives, declaratives and imperatives used in the interchange between the symbol of power, Chief Mbu, the employer of labour and the widows who work for him in his quarry (pp.27-28).

71. //Women, I see you are still not working// if you do not want to work,// then what are you doing at my quarry?// Is this a kitchen// where you gather to gossip and //while away your time?// (p.27)

72. //Chief, welcome//. We are here because this is where we work.// We have been waiting for you to tell us to continue working...// (p.27)

73. //What is stopping you?// Why are you not working?// Did you wait for me in the past before working each day?...// Leave the site if you do not want to work //and I will hire other people to replace you...// (p.27)

74. //But Chief, what about the pay increase// we asked for?...// (p.28)

75. //Woman, do not annoy me...// I am not adding a kobo to what I pay you.// If you do not like what you receive,// then go away//. (p.28)

76. //Chief, you pay us only three thousand naira per month...// It is not even half of the minimum wage set by the government...// It is because we are widows and hopeless// that we accepted this amount for...three years//. (p.28)

We note in the above interchange the use of derogatory vocatives on the widows as lesser mortals by Chief Mbu as against the edifying vocative used by the widows to address him. To Chief Mbu, they are just women, not to be taken seriously, to be cajoled with their stereotypic chatter and foolhardiness. The widows' approach to the tyranny of Chief Mbu is that of discreet respect, quiet reproach and obstinacy. They knew that this weapon of subtle tenacity to their demands would be more efficacious and would defeat the guns and the bodyguards of their oppressor. Invoking their ascribed subordinate status in male-female interaction gained their agency and won their battle against agents of cultural and political repressions.

5.3. Widows' Struggle for Agency in the Transitivity system

CDA perspective of discourse as a means of constructing as well as challenging dominance is obvious in the three texts under review.

The power structures ascribed negative attributes through discourse and discursive practices to widows as exemplified in the sample clauses. In the same vein, the widows used the only means at their disposal - discourse - to subvert these stigmatizing and dehumanizing social constructions. This is seen in the sample materials and relational clauses on Tables 6 and 7 below.

Table 6: Material Clauses Showing Widows' Struggle for Agency

Texts	Clauses	Actor	Process- Material	Goal/Scope	Circumstance
1	77 (14) 78 (14) 79 (14) 80 (14)	I I I She	can't let(...) suffer am prepared to die have tried to save would guard	them (my children) for them my children them	while I'm still alive even if I fail... like a mother hen...
2	81 (48) 82 (53) 83 (53) 84 (55)	We Ezeji I She	shouldn't let has just put will not drink will give	men use us something it him the fight	to police ourselves into the water when the time comes
3	85 (29) 86 (30)	We A toad	want can blame	a decent life no one but himself	like everyone else for not growing a tail.

Table 7: Relational Clauses Showing Widows' Struggle for Agency

Texts	Clauses	Carrier	Proc.- Relational	Attribute	Circumstance
1	87 (10) 88 (8) 89 (14) 90 (14)	They I My daughter My son	are am is looks	my children/my soul healers your mother a carbon copy of her father like me	
2	91 (46) 92 (47) 93 (55)	Whoever accuses me... Ezeji She	is is is not	wicked a wicked liar afraid	of him (Ezeji) anymore
3	94 (29) 95 (12) 96 (30)	We We A goat	are are is not	people (not hands) elephants and leopards rodent	that is roasted over a small fire

5.4. Widows' Struggle for Agency in the Mood System

In the Mood system, there was a shift in the power allocation. The force of the interchange shifts to the less dominant in the use of interrogations and commands. In Text1, as soon as Somadi's children were safely with her, and she had convinced the driver of her good intentions that she meant well and was not a kidnapper, she became bolder and commanded the driver:

97. You can take me to the police station// if you still want to, //if you don't believe my story.// (p.14)

In Text 2, Anayo, who had not looked the inlaw in the face since she came into the family, nor Eletty when she was being interrogated by the *Umu-okpu*, took on the voice of command:

98. //Take a sip (of the bath water) to prove your innocence// and I'll drink the rest. (p.53)

99. //Say something.//You saw Ezeji put something in the water, didn't you?// (p.53)

In Text 3, Uto, the leader of the stone crushers and Kemi, one of the widows, were resolute in the face of brutal force. They utilized the most precious assertion of agency for an Igbo woman - motherhood.

100. //Do not touch her.// Do you not have a mother?// Why, she is old enough to be your mother.// (p.30)

101. //What kind of man hits a woman and without provocation?// Young man, you are wicked and very foolish.// //May a dog lick your eyes.// (p. 31)

102. //You hit me?...// You will die like a dog!// (p.31)

These curses, invoked with the motherhood role, did the magic and averted the use of brutal force on the striking widows by the employer. That role gave them the boldness to interrogate the power elite.

6. Discussion

The three texts represented in succinct terms the sufferings of widows in the domestic and public spheres due to negative widowhood construction in the Igbo culture. The two stories from *The Trial and Other Stories* focused on domestic trauma unleashed on widows which touched on those vital areas that give an Igbo woman agency: love of the husband and custody of children. *Hands that Crush Stone* emphasized the discrimination meted out to widows in workplaces where they are relegated to cheap labour and exploited because of their vulnerability.

Analysis in the Transitivity system shows that the participant-process-circumstance configuration construes widows as responsible agents in the death of their spouses. Material clauses construe widows as Actors of incriminating Goals and Goals or Beneficiary (Recipient) of repressive sanctions situated in Circumstances of reason, manner, time, cause, condition and others. Examples are seen on the data in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Similarly, Table 4 illustrates the relational clauses used to assign the widows to social categories that set them apart as accomplices in the demise of their husbands, as psychopaths that should be avoided, as the bottom heap of humanity that should be subjected to menial tasks and as the wretched of the earth.

Data on Table 5 buttress these assertions in the verbal processes exemplifying the discourse of widowhood and how the society construes widows' actions. The various Verbiage confirm that the Igbo society see the widow as culpable in the death their husbands, as an agent that should take complete responsibility of the spouse's wellbeing even to the point of self-denial, one that should be at the receiving end of reproach should any mishap befall the husband, one that by nature is fickle minded, foolish and wicked. It is therefore obvious that the worldview portrayed in the three texts is a world that is not favourable to the widows' personal disposition, a world of predetermined social suspicion, where the widow is the primary suspect of the husband's demise, where she has little or no space to rid herself of blame.

From the analysis in the Mood system, it is obvious from the texts that the custodians of cultural and social power used more of interrogative, imperative and Mood tags to enforce their unverified allegations on the widows while the widows used more of declarative clauses and modal adjuncts that highlight their struggles with external cultural forces as well as inner forces of self-judgement as to the extent of their culpability in the demise of their partners.

The choice of the widow personae in these texts set in contemporary Igbo culture seem to be signalling the lack of change from the traditional construction of widowhood and the modern social practice. One would assume that some of the issues raised in the texts should belong to a previous era but the authors were convinced that socially widows, in spite of their level of education and enlightenment, still have the halo of responsibility hanging over them at the demise of their partners occasioned by the patriarchal order that prescribe patrilineal inheritance system. In this set-up, if the widow is ostracised through false accusations for the husband's death, the husband's siblings take over the inheritance.

These portrayals present desperate widows who have been pushed to point zero (El Sadawi, 2007) where their only escape is to take drastic measures to assert their agency or sink into oblivion. The two authors share similar views about the widows' vulnerable position in the Igbo culture. They share the view that widows should take their destiny in their own hands and fight social forces that stigmatize and dehumanize them. They share the view that discourse as a powerful instrument of social construction of dominant worldviews could also become the instrument of the powerless and the subjugated to deconstruct and subvert dominance.

The authors thus gave voice and action to widows to counter the verbalizations and actions of the powerful. This is exemplified in the counter interrogatives and imperatives in Text 2 Clauses 98 and 99 and Text 3 Clauses 100 to 102. The subtle but loaded declarative clauses employed by the widows in the texts (see Tables 6 and 7) may seem to place them in a subordinate social position but they also seem to give them a niche and a voice to counter the formidable force of the powerful interrogatives and Mood tags of the social symbols of power, empowering them to gain agency

The narratives in the three texts raise some basic questions for critical discourse analysis. They put some query on the silence of tradition regarding the false accusation levelled on the widow by agents of tradition and cultural and social practices. Why should traditional norms impose such decapitating penalty on a widow falsely accused of murder of her husband but leaves the falsehood of the accuser to go unpunished? Why should traditional and social forces not put a check on further molestation of the widow by such predators like the Ezejis, the in-laws, husband siblings and employers of labour of this world who continue to wreck havoc on the widow in their selfish bid to deprive her and her children of their rightful inheritance or subject them to perpetual squalor?

Ezeji's threats in Text 2; 'You are not going to inherit anything from your husband. You are not going to inherit the property of a man you have murdered. I'll see to it and this time around nothing can save you', shows, just like Anayo anticipates, that the battle is far from over. Similarly in Text 1, the perpetual fear of the incarcerating sanctions of husbands' siblings hangs over the widow like an everlasting halo from which there is no escape. According to Somadi, the widow-protagonist, 'she knew that the battle would continue.

Her husband's people would try to take Ada and KC away from her but she would guard them as a mother hen guards her chicks from the ravenous kite' (p.14). Just as has been pointed out in the previous text, why should traditional practices be more negative against the widow who not only had to suffer the excruciating pain of loss of a loved spouse, but also had to contend with obnoxious traditional widowhood practices which do not apply equally to their male counterparts?

7. Conclusion

The three texts have given insights into what it means to be a widow in the Igbo culture, the trauma, deprivations, stigmatization and dehumanization that become the widow's lot at the demise of their spouses. The question is whether this practice is justified given its repressive potentials on the humanness of the widows. The texts have created awareness of the social anomalies perpetrated by the so-called agents of tradition and the onus lies on us as social actors to learn from them. Since literature mirrors real life experiences, the lessons we learn from these imaginary social actors will enable us respond positively to real life occurrences of these widowhood practices in order to form a society that accommodates all individuals irrespective of their gender and other socially contrived categorizations.

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