

Orality And Gender In African Literature: Example Of Ogba Folklore And Masquerade Performances

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Abstract

Orality is the thought and verbal expression in societies where technologies of literacy are unfamiliar to most of the population. It is also the quality of being verbally communicated. This discourse attempts to explore how verbal communication in Ogba folklore performance(s) is gender-based. It mainly focuses on the exclusion of femininity (matriarchy) in favour of masculinity (patriarchy) to explore the relationship of both in the Ogba cultural context; using folklore to espouse gender disparity. Indeed, this paper focuses on the dimension of orality and gender in Ogba folklore, especially the use of gendered folkloric materials in Ogba funeral songs, masquerades and myths performances. This paper interrogates in a subtle manner these gender issues in the Ogba folklore. It reveals that orality and gender are main focus of Ogba oral literature; hence matriarchy is subsumed under patriarchy in Ogba folklore performance as is practised in other African societies. Over the years, the African woman's battle for freedom and equal opportunities has been made more difficult by the fact that she has access only to weapons conceded to her by her male counterparts; this is also present in literature. It is generally accepted that with few exceptions, contemporary societies in Africa are patriarchal, hence it should be discouraged.

Keywords: Orality, Gender, African Literature, Ogba Folklore, Patriarchy.

Introduction

This paper attempts to critique Ogba folklore, particularly folktale and its structures which exclude the female gender. In Ogba folklore just like any other thing, gender plays a significant role; these extend to inanimate objects such as crops and days of the week. The influence of gender on Ogba Cosmology is great – Ogba is patrilineal society. The man is the head of the household. This so, irrespective of his economy power. Inheritance, story-telling, patterns of decision-making are based on gender lines. Gender is considered more in religious matters. According to Obodoegbulam Agi-Otto (2019), “throughout Ogba Land, only males becomes priest, only men pour libation and only men cook sacrificial meals. When such a meal is set, women may eat or may not depending on the deity concerned” (P. 33).

The folktale in Ogba is regarded as one-man theatre for in it resides the narrator's ability to manipulate content and form in order to achieve the aim of the narration. In folktale narrative performance in Ogba, the women strive to challenge the male dominance as they forcefully engage to render some aspects which fall mainly in the domain of stories with animal characters/fairytale to teach morals to children. The same is applicable to masquerade performances where women are excluded and later considered as *Owuma*, *Nneowu* and *Nneogbo* if their birth took place on moments of masquerade festivals or sacrifices.

It is men who employ various aspects of verbal aesthetics and mimesis in the narration for indeed the beauty of the art is integral to the wholesomeness of the communicative process that will ultimately emphasise the understanding of content little wonder Jasper Ahaoma Onuekwusi (2013) notes that "the domains of entertaining provision of education compels the narrator/actor to be all things to all men in a folktale theatre. This is why some scholars regard the folktale session as one-man theatre..." (P. 246). In Ogba, folktales and masquerade performances are exclusively kept for the male, the women tell stories of animal characters and not those of human characters and mixed characters.

One aspect of language that impacts the development process in rural communities is oral literature. It is a very important aspect of many cultures around Africa. It encompasses various forms of folklore; storytelling such as folktales, myths, legends and proverbs, which are passed down from generation to generation through oral means. Such stories entertain and engage listeners and also serve as means of transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and knowledge. In most cases the process of transmission is gendered in line with patriarchal provisions. Richard Gill (2017) notes that "Oral literature should be viewed right from outset, as an artistic expression of a community's cultural heritage through spoken words and performance. It is a dynamic and living tradition that reflects the history, customs, and worldview of a particular group" (P. 270).

The collective experience and belief of the African for instance, frequently influence the social and cultural values of the African society, as reflected in its oral literature. Such narratives serve as a reflection of societal norms and customs. Nkem Okoh (2002) affirms that "the only way for the scholar working in any African culture to proceed is to identify in various or different forms of narrative recognises by the culture" (P. 116). Such norms and customs as are found in Ogba is the male-prerogative to render funeral songs and myths in their occasion of performance; not feigning ignorance of the complexities and challenges faced by individuals trying to navigate the changing times. This is against the background of the power of storytelling in preserving cultural heritage, for which man is the sole custodian. It should be stated here clearly that the changes brought about by the advent of written literature also brought about a shift in the way in which power exerted, as those who could read and write had advantage over

those who relied solely on oral tradition. This created a divide within communities, with some embracing the new form of communication while others struggle to adapt. This notwithstanding, orality and gender play a huge role in African literature and its development processes.

Oral literature is a combination of two words: oral and literature. Oral refers to the act of speaking or communicating through spoken words; literature connotes written words. Literature, whether oral or written, uses captivating language to express ideas, feelings, observations and experiences. "It affords individuals the privilege of acquiring knowledge of other cultures and geographical locations of distant lands, giving opportunity for cultural assimilation, ideology of cultural pluralism, liberalism and global citizenship" (Abdul & Mohammed, 2023). Literature however, transcends mere written words. The fact that there exists captivating and long-lasting legacies that encompass the notion of literature within the realm of verbal arts also referred to as oral literature, is undeniable. Literature can be found in performances in theatre such as dance and music. It can also be expressed through visual mediums like paintings and sculptures, where artists use their creativity to convey stories and emotions through art works. Moses Khatte (2023) opines: "All of these make room for the unique and immersive experience that bring the written word to life in a way that cannot be replicated on paper" (P. 28). This is also supported by Matthew Hussan (2023), Olaniyi .J. Agbaje (2012) and Francis B.O. Akproparo (2012) in their various works.

Oral literature is the act of speaking and sharing stories, poems of literature verbally. It is the spoken version of literature and predates its written counterpart. It is usually transmitted orally from one individual to another. It encompasses a wide range of narratives, including folktale, ballad, dance, myth, masquerade, festival and more. It allows for a direct and personal connection between the storyteller and the audience, creating a sense of community and shared experience. The importance of storytelling lies not only in preserving cultural traditions and history, but also in fostering empathy and understanding among individuals. It has the power to captivate listeners and evoke emotions, making it a powerful tool for communication and entertainment, especially in Africa. Myth, legend and folktale constitute storytelling/narrative in African literature. Jasper Ahaoma Onukwusi (2013) states that "folktales are very popular..., it is the one that most frequently fulfils the entertainment and educational function of oral literature" (P. 84).

In many instances and in Ogbia particularly, oral literature gets the initial encounter for individuals as regards literature. Verbal art forms such as folktales, proverbs, riddles, masquerades and epics are the exclusive reserves of the male folk and are passed down from generation through storytelling and performance. Oral literature is a repository of artistic expression in a society; a dynamic and interactive form of literature that engages listeners and allows for improvisation and adaptation overtime. Despite the stark disparity that exists between oral and written literature, it will be incorrect to assert that

oral literature is out of place. Oyeniyi Okunoye (2019) asserts that “Everything that is written was initially conceived orally and in most instances, spoken aloud” (P. 8).

A common feature of literature is characterised as a replication of existence. To this end, an individual can craft a narrative that accurately reflects his community or immediate environment, and narrate same to a specific group of people. While the tale remains unwritten, the listeners are engaged with the narrative as the storyteller creatively puts words together in order to pass on the message. Should there be anyone among the listeners that possesses the ability to read and write, such an individual can record the tale shared, and this births literature in written form, from spoken tradition. According to Asabe Kabir Usman (2019) “hence, literature does not necessarily have to be confined to written form; it can also be expressed orally, as long as it is articulated in a human language” (P. 84).

Ogba ethnic nationality in Rivers State has its unique oral traditions – folktales, masquerades, proverbs, songs and chants. These oral forms of expression entertain, educate and instil moral values to the listeners (audience). They serve as a means of cultural identity and cohesion, connecting individuals to their heritage and ancestors. It is the archive of artistic expression of the Ogba society. According to Laura & George (2022), “through storytelling and spoken word, individuals can share their experiences, challenges, and aspirations, give voice to marginalised communities and advocate for social change” (p.201). Oral literature has the ability to unite people in a shared narrative, creating a collective consciousness that goes beyond boundaries, and promotes understanding among different ethnic groups.

Historical events and experiences play significant role in shaping the content and themes of [Ogba] oral literature. Stories passed down orally often reflect the collective memory of the ethnic nation, such as important historical events, triumphs and struggles. Other historical events such as wars, migrations, or cultural exchanges, can influence the content and theme of Ogba oral literature as is evident in her folklore: proverbs, folktales, songs, chants, masquerade performances and more. These narratives serve as a way to preserve and transmit important historical knowledge from one generation to another.

In like manner, personal experiences of [male] individuals within the community may also form the content of the tradition [folklore]. This adds depth and authenticity to the storytelling tradition. Ben-Fred Ohia (2024) notes: “such narratives not only convey historical facts but also emotions, values, and cultural beliefs that are passed down through generations” (P. 6).

Aspects of Orality in Oral Literature

Orality is the unique characteristics and features that arise from the spoken nature of

oral works. Some of the aspects of orality include spontaneity. Oral literature is often created and performed spontaneously without prior written preparation. Immediacy is another aspect of oral literature. Oral performances are typically immediate and ephemeral, existing only in the movement of performance. Oral literature often involves active participation from the audience through call and response patterns, singing or other forms of engagement in the oral rendition. It is also often characterised by variation and improvisation as performances adapt and modify the work in response to their audience and context. Oral literature frequently employs formulaic language such as repetitive phrases, rhythms, and metaphors to facilitate memorisation and transmission. In words of Ben-Fred Ohia (2025) “all these aspects of orality are found in Ogba folklore and masquerade performances and other oral pieces in the African continent” (P. 12).

As part of the aspects of orality, oral techniques are used in African oral literature to spice up the aesthetics, style and content of the oral performance. Repetition is a common technique used in oral literature to emphasise important points, create rhythm, and aid memorisation. It often employs rhythm and metre to create a musical quality and enhance memorability. Psalms Chinaka (2017) defines rhythm and metre thus: “The term 'rhythm' refers to the sense of flow or regular movement communicated by the pattern of stress (arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables) in a poem. The poetic metre is essentially in the repetition of a regular pattern of beats in poems organised by lines of syllables” (P. 48)

Frequently oral literary performance use alliteration and assonance to create a musical quality and add emphasis to the performance. They often employ imagery and symbolism and convey complex ideas and emotions. With all these aspects in vogue, orality is fully harnessed in oral literature.

Impact of Orality

Orality is highly impactful to the performer, performance and the community. Oral literature has the power to build and strengthen community bonds through the shared performance and participation. Oral literature plays crucial role in preserving cultural heritage and transmitting traditional beliefs from one generation to the next. This becomes very imperative in rural African communities with a low level of educational literacy hence the oral means of communication becomes faster and effective. Orality in African literature allows for dynamic creativity, as performers can adapt and modify the performance in response to their audience and context.

Orality as a mode of communication is a tool of both empowerment and marginalisation of gender relations. Orality is empowerment to the men and serves as marginalisation to the women who are short-circuited in any discussion or family issues where major decision will be taken. Their presence is merely passive as they are barred from making any meaningful contribution to decision-making in the family meeting. They are not

allowed to use proverbs in any conversation while the men take major decisions in the family and use proverbs randomly.

Challenges of Orality

The numerous advantages and positive impacts of orality as enumerated in this paper notwithstanding, oral literature is often ephemeral, existing only in the moments of performance. The ephemerality allows for variability. Oral literature can be variable, with different performances and versions emerging over time, and this equally creates limited accessibility. Oral literature can be limited in its accessibility, as it may not be widely disseminated or documented despite the trend of globalisation.

Herein, also, lies one of the 'weaknesses' of orality. The oral nature of even a factual narrative means that the material itself is often subject to several changes one telling to another. In fact, what is true today to one person may be fictionalised at a later date by another. Nkem Okoh (2002) puts it thus: "in giving an account of a war between, say, two villages, each narrator will attempt to paint a picture of his village as one whose men are great warriors and indomitable fighters, even if in reality they had suffered several humiliating defeats in the same war" (P. 120). Similarly, the rendition of an anecdote is based solely on the narrator's personal experience and this portends a great challenge to the storytelling genre.

Orality in Ogba Folklore

In Ogba, folklore is a complex term that names both process and product in the oral/aural, visual, and performing arts, thus making it appropriate for the rendition of folktales *atitaa*, myths *ataa*, play-songs *ebowu* and masquerade (*okrosnu*) as regenerative performances. Folklore *omelali* as Ogba indigenous concept requires viewing old structures and discourses (of visual, verbal, performing, traditions) in order to more meaningfully respond to individual or societal needs and desires. As Sunday Anozie (1992) has rightly observed, our traditional lore is meant for "our moral edification, social entertainment, and for our creative sustenance" (p.8). Therefore, *omelali* allows us to examine men's retold folktales and masquerade performances as "a pure site for the kind of productive tension and reciprocity that pertains between structuring mode of tradition and the vitality of individual creativity and improvisation" (Ohia 2021, p.77).

Among the Ogba, as with other Nigerian and African contexts, literature is performance, which is a coordinated, cooperative and communal activity of performers, mostly male and audience often emerge and provoke or urge one another to lift up their game, thus enriching the artistry. Yet, individual autonomy is encouraged, even expected as captured in the concept of *omelali*. This denotes courage, daring, risk taking innovative drive to confront a situation. The term connotes perspective, how the artist sees or feels and fits into art through imagination, originality, self-reflection,

reconstruction, insight and judgments. In Ogba society, intelligence by itself is not of the highest currency, the position of explaining and interpreting strands of Ogba lore is traditional mode.

Many of the folklore themes in Ogba are devoted to gender and family. Such themes reflect the social relationship that exists between the male and female, among the women folks in the larger society, within the family setting and the lives of the children in polygamous homes. The themes and metaphors in these songs, chants, myths, folktales and others are articulated in clear gender focus that addresses with human face, various gender conflicts that tends to distort social equilibrium. The issues are stretched from domestic tussles, co-wives politics, to sexual as well as psychological struggle.

In Ogba masquerade for instance, restrictions are rife and rotate in the axes of gender and initiation. Masquerade performance thrives on orality. The shows are all dramatic acts just as funeral dramas. Due to orality, the masquerade theatre can be a market place, arena or residential front yards and patios, streets, lanes and road junctions. It is characteristically a moving theatre, a fact captured by an Ogba proverb. "*Onodi ga wo la ohnu ede eleri okrosnu*" – you do not stay in one place to watch a masquerade.-

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-According to Chukwuma (1994): "In summary: the oral performance is guided by occasion, temporal, concatival (sic) and gender consideration. These conditions point to the fact that oral literature is a contrived art form with strong social attributes aimed at all. Every member of the society is involved variously in different capacities of realisation either actively or passively in this oral performance" (Pp.222-223). The point made by Chukwuma points to the pervasiveness, aliveness, currency, aesthetics and function of the oral performance which themselves are sustaining features of the oral art form.

Similarly, proverb is another Ogba lore that is transmitted orally. The concept of Ogba proverbs is to allow people in Ogba to embrace their culture and tradition and build morals. Proverbs are a communication tool used to impart wisdom from the elders (man) to the younger generation. They are used to communicate the idea of conflict resolution which is predominantly male prerogative; they have the persuasive power to advice, guide and influence conflicting parties to settle their issues peacefully.

Ohia (2024) notes "the use of proverbs is an indigenous conflict resolution mechanism. Indigenous conflict resolution mechanism comprises social, economic, cultural and religious-spiritual dimensions in accordance with the entirety of traditions, customs, and world views of a society within different spheres of social life" (p.5). The Ogba oral tradition is a storytelling event, which presents fictions with some historical data to prove their authenticity. The Ogba tradition portrays the dynamics of lively and

theoretical art form with some characteristics or features of literature.

The oral traditional story (myth, legend, folktale, song, masquerade, greetings, etc.) is purported to be real but with questionable veracity because of the transience of oral communication. This trend injects oral traditions into literature. "...Ogba myths, songs, folktales, legends and masquerade festivals are literature and also linked with global dynamics of myths, legends, songs, folktales and masquerade festivals such as historicity, narrative, entertainment and other literary narratives employed in the narrative such as the use of language, characters, plot/theme, setting, etc. (Ohia 2018, p.3). In line with oral literary demand, every oral tradition in Ogba is performed orally in an occasion. Occasionality is an integral feature of oral literature. Every occasion determines the type of performance. Orality is an integral part also; the songs, dances, myths, folktales, legends are composed and performed in a particular occasion. Oral traditions form an integral part of the culture of any group of people. In Ogba, "they are also the beliefs and customs which define the Ogba ethnic nationality and its lifestyle that displays the people's code of conduct. Oral traditions are verbally transmitted" (Ohia 2023, p.13). "Proverb is a symbol of strength, beauty, wisdom of the elders (male). The use of proverbs by Ogba male elders is considered to be an embodiment of ancient wisdom, ideas as well as knowledge" (Ohia 2023, p.59).-The oral artist in Ogba folklore tradition is distinguished according to the genre of the Ogba oral literature he performs. A good narrator may not necessarily be a good singer, a good riddler or even a skilled user of proverbs. Often a story can be summed up quite effectively in a proverb, a good example is the story "why the he-goat married his mother", which is derived from the proverb – *Adi ka mkpu amrna wo, eka a zni a* – what the hill does not understand, the plane will teach him. The traditional artist in Ogba is thus every man and any man sufficiently knowledgeable by the literary traditions of the people and capable of communicating this in an entertaining way to an audience.

In genres as prose narratives, women may be allowed to play participatory role as there is no strict gender discrimination made as in other genres like the poetry genre, especially in the proverbs. Women are barred from the use of proverbs, settlement of disputes, family discussions and land issues. Every woman in Ogba traditional society is expected to have small stock of tales to tell her children – but it is realised that a few can tell stories well especially folktales and myths. That people take turns to tell stories does not necessarily make them artists. They are merely gifted and their talent and competence distinguish them from the generality of men who might know as much as, if not sometimes more than them. The Ogba society is a highly patriarchal society; the tradition is gender-based- even oral performance.

Gender in African Literature

Modern African literature had emerged as a vista to privilege patriarchy, male

hegemonic treatise in the continent. The need to foreclose feminist mindset has ever remained pertinent in African cosmos hence modern African literature finds a safe haven in this direction. African postcolonial discourse has been largely dominated by recourse to reclaim lost glory which slave trade, colonialism had done so much to undermine and confine to the trash-can of history. From about the late colonial period to the mid-sixty era of political independence in most African states, a nationalistic fervour had emerged to champion the counter-discursive interrogation of the bastion of western hegemonic standpoint on the one hand, and its overt claim to cross-cultural universality on the other.

Amongst others, the social-cultural commitment of African critics foregrounds the use of literature as a reliable medium for the repudiation of unsubstantiated criticism from western critics on a continent whose epistemology they do not consider worthy of a sustained scholarly inquiry. Akin Olaniyi (2016) observes that “feminist epistemological standpoint has precluded its own adaptability to African critical engagement as a reliable model, particularly with the 21st century yearning for cultural revamping on which continental development can be premised” (p.43). From Olaniyi's view, feminist critical standpoint has unarguably, provided a vista for a cross-cultural critique of gender discourse which is suggestive of the fact that African literature is gender-based. Feminist epistemology is premised on sexist prejudices and judgemental stance which foreground its intellectual foundation.

Society and its cultural configurations are important elements in shaping the kind of literature found in that environment. Apart from providing the social canvas from which the literatures are framed, society provides the institutional framework for the literary works to thrive. In Ogba society for instance, masquerades as a rule are taboo to women. This no doubt, is founded as strong patriarchal base of the society. Ohia (2021's) position is valid; “the reason for excluding women is to “spiritualise” or deify the cult as symbolic re-enactment of the social structure of the society which is principally patriarchal” (p.208). The monopoly of the male gender is not only because of their energy but a consideration to the discomfiture, the roughness and hazards involved in the masquerade enterprise which make women's participation undesirable.

-Again it becomes plausible that male superiority syndrome is vested on them by patriarchy as well as the vicious way they seek to maintain this exclusive male preserve. The female taboo is enforced with hideous punishments, the extreme of which is ostracism or harassment and bodily violence. In Ogba, women are not allowed outdoor on special masquerade days as *Idu-oknomini* and *Ime Okwnu*, (masquerade yearly festivals) and *ichnu eja aho* (masquerade yearly sacrifices). Women are to remain indoors and anyone who thus meets *okrosnu* unawares is taken to be liable to a fine of one goat and other items like yam and drinks. The purpose of these punitive horrors is clear, to instil awe, fear, dread of the masquerade by women. With this, male assures sanctimoniousness of the masquerade cult. It becomes worrisome that such hideous

reprisals are heaped for meagre offence by women when some masks themselves carry the female portraiture as the popular *nwanaynima* adorned with female motif and carried by male dancers. -The masquerade in the drama genre of oral literature is the overall finding principle and spiritual energy of the people, a sustaining and enforcing principle of life, order and continuity. Its power lies in its mystery, and once its mystery is demystified, its potency is lost. Therefore, it becomes the exclusive domain of the male gender which is strong enough to maintain it. Masquerade in the traditional Ogba society is a symbol of government authority itself, consonance of spirit and human forces keeping order and maintaining peace in the land. The restrictions in masquerade cults are almost total for women but extended to uninitiated men *opokisi*. Such men scamper away as women do in the advance of a masquerade, because if they step their bounds they also meet stiff penalties as the women. Women in Ogba communities deserve inclusion in folklore rendition and masquerade performances; non-inclusivity of the women renders performances incomplete when their voices are not heard. This paper calls for the dismantling of patriarchal structures as the ideas of domination, inequality, suppression and oppression are anathema to respect for human dignity. At the risk of stating the obvious we shall recall the justification of women's participation in oral performances because they are the best storytellers and closer to the children who desire the story than the men.

Most importantly, the two justifications for the existence of the patriarchal structure have been debunked. Aduke Adebayo (2008) notes that “first is the Freudian “anatomy is destiny” explanation which bases male superiority on the biological differences between the male and female.” In this case male dominance is taken as natural and God-given by reason of man's strength while the woman is considered weak by the reason of her reproductive role and less physical strength” (P.2).

As a way to strengthen the African woman, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie introduced “STIWANISM” an African centred feminist theory. The term was coined from the acronym STIWA which stands for Social Transformation in Africa including women. The Concept emphasises the active participation and inclusion of African women in the continent's social and political transformations. In her seminal work, *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women and critical transformations*, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie outlines seven core principles of stiwanism as focus on contemporary African woman, highlighting indigenous feminism, resistance to western feminism, advocacy for socio-political participation, examination of women identity, emphasis on individuals and collective identities and recognition of diverse experiences. These principles collectively aim to foster a nuanced understanding of African women's roles and to drive meaningful societal change. According to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, “it is to identify the transformation of both challenges and recreations and seeking to begin anew on premises different and have the main vision centred around Africa, her suffering people's and her women in particular” (P. 89).

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie brings fresh and liberatory perspectives in African literature, gender politics, and development. As she combines intellectual work with activism and creativity, she reveals her own insertion and those of other African women into critical junctures of transformation in Africa today.

Un-initiates *opokisi* of *okrosnu* masquerade cult in Ogba who ever step their bounds also meet stiff penalties. They are singled out for special victimisation at the hands of the mask when it is raised to play. They are in some instances taunted to annoyance to become initiated. Orality in oral literature thrives on performance and there is a sense in which this aspect permeates written literature; the oral style renders much life and appeal to the narrative. The oral tradition is solid and factual; people use it in different ways and forms but retain the distinctive features that characterise it. It is clear that the oral tradition in literature is alive and modern writers draw and adapt this tradition in their writings.

One of the basic tenets of feminism is the issue that bothers on intra-gender, portrayal of women in African literary texts. This poses a major concern to women. It examines the masculine roles given to male characters that stand in contrast to the dormant and distorted portraiture of female characters in literature as this reflects the true African patriarchal societies. Feminism in literature, especially African literature entails the recognition that virtually across time and place, men and women are unequal in the power they have, either in society or over their own lives, and corollary belief that men and women should be equal; the belief that knowledge has been written about, and for men and the corollary belief that all schools of knowledge must be re-examined and understood to reveal the extent to which they ignore or distort gender. It is often the arguments of many feminist critics that men have sustained and perpetuated their century-long patriarchal position in the society by creating stereotypes with which they deliberately subjugate women.

The notion of “intra-gender”, in the context of this paper, is the relationship that exists among a particular gender/sex – the female gender. It presupposes the fact that aside the universal dichotomy that exists between the male and female, that derives from the strained and adverse relationship among women. Buchi Emecheta (2008) informs that “half of the problem rests with women, they are busy bitching about one... another” (p.36). Women, themselves are contributors to much of the oppression as well as the intellectual and moral characters to women.

The posturing of superiority of men to women has lately run congruent with the attitude of value and care lavished on women for their roles as wives, mothers and romantic partners. In consequence, some sort of ambivalence or double-edged way of thinking has been created: antagonism and disrespect on the one hand, deference and care on the other; antipathy, resentment, and anger toward women on the one hand, intense affection and “worshipful view” on the other. This posturing has insidiously whittled

down the often genuine attempt at the emancipation of women in general. This ambivalent sexism is a cog in the wheel of progress of the African woman's quest for liberation. The historic association of gender with sex forecloses that gender is predetermined by sex was reflected in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report in 1986:

The term gender denotes the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes the way in which society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology (UNDP 1986, p.258).

Conclusion

This paper has examined orality and gender in African Literature and has raised salient points as the bother on these issues. The gender specific nature of punishment as expressed earlier in this paper, in traditional folktales, masquerades and other folklore activities in Ogba and other African communities generally suggests that the supernatural “neutralises” and thus reinforces existing patriarchal constraints on women. It is such regulation of females' lives in traditional activities and even in the use of language where they are prohibited to use proverbs and participate in land and other matters that women interrogate and challenge in their literary works by portraying female protagonists who deploy various means to thwart male and/or supernatural power and assert their own subjective agency. Contemporary Ogba/African women view the traditional corpus of folktales, masquerades and other traditional cultures as a patriarchal inheritance which must be changed as they critically engage means of foregrounding women's perspectives.

Oral literature thrives in orality and occasion of performance as it is usually argued that committing oral literature to writing kills it a little. This is so because the genres of oral literature are realised through performance and this feature cannot be committed to writing. If committed to writing, it loses its flavour as some of the words in the native culture have no equivalent in the English language and any foreign language. The memory is the archive and store-house for the literature. However, oral literature could exist side by side with a rich stream of written literature without any distortion of its contents. Oral and written literatures are better appreciated for their complementarities than for their differences.

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