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Gender Exploitation in Igboland: Exploring Stories from Lejja *Ọmaba* Chant and *Americanah* by Chimamanda Adichie

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Abstract

In traditional Igbo society, gender exploitation is always a negative trait of the male folk. Men are usually the victimizers while women and girls are the victims. Because they are physically stronger than women, the men perpetrate such crimes as battery, rape and other violent assaults on them. This paper explored the depiction of gender exploitation in *Ọmaba* chant (*Egara Ọmaba*), an all-male Igbo masking chant composition, and *Americanah* to ascertain the extent of the employment of the concept of exploitation and its implications in the texts. The Theory of Otherness by the Existentialist, Simone de Beauvoir (1949), was critically deployed to determine the "Dominator" and the "Dominated" in the texts. Among the findings is that exploitation is employed positively in contradiction to the Igbo traditional ethics, to highlight the inestimable power of woman that she exercises at will. Although physically weaker, a woman in the contemporary world of competition and scarcity of resources could manipulate a man against his wish, and use him as a metaphorical rung to climb to her identity, independence and societal success. The findings, therefore, reverse the principles of the Theory of Otherness which assigns the victim role to the woman.

Keywords: Gender, Exploitation, Moral decadence, Otherness, Ethics reversal.

Introduction

In feminism, women are the sufferers of misogyny as a result of the superiority role placed on men by patriarchy. According to Jessica Krivis et al, "Women in Greek mythology were perceived to be more as sexual objects than individuals. Many were taken advantage of by the gods and by human beings" (n.d). Also, Krivis posits that,

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in the "Elizabethan Literature, women were not looked at as a person but were considered a mere necessity for the procreation process." Early feminists like Mary Astell argue that women are exploited because of "poor education" and "custom" (quoted in Simeon Webb, 2013). In order not to be influenced negatively by the menfolk, "Mary Wollstonecraft advises that women should not be confined to domestic work, they need to get proper education like men" Weijie, Chen (2010). That is to say that a woman's lower financial status makes her dependent on man and therefore prone to masculine exploitation.

In the Existentialism Theory of Simeone de Beauvoir, the term "other" is a structuralist concept that applies the binary opposition in the definition of characters in literature. While one group appears more important and highly valued, the other possesses less or is valueless; for example, oppressor/oppressed and victim/assailant. Otherness, with regard to gender, means the negative values that are depicted in a character. In other words, the proper characters can be distinguished by their difference from the improper characters who are represented as somehow "other" to the norm. This study shall base its investigation on the Dominator and the Dominated oppositions in order to assign values to the characters in the texts.

As a result of the numeral challenges of the competitive contemporary world like migration, racial discrimination, natural disaster, scarcity of resources and violence, the survival of the fittest mantra resonates. Woman, just like the folkloric trickster, weaker in physical strength, has to survive. In other words, there must be a survival mechanism. It is based on the propositions that Americanah and Egara *Ọmaba* (*Ọmaba* chant) are explored in order to highlight the challenges of woman in meeting the demands of modernity. In order to successfully portray the power of the modern woman, Adichie sees positivity in negating the traditional ethical values.

Woman in Igbo Folkore

Women in Igbo folklore have been given a paradoxical depiction by previous researchers. Chukwuma Azuonye (1992) opines that women in Igbo are viewed as both powerful and powerless. The woman's image as a powerful being is manifest in the role of the Earth goddess -*Ala*. Earth in this case symbolizes the source of sustenance for mankind, the ancestral abode and a place for the eternal cycle of rebirth. It is also a place where mankind retires to in death, and as well the pathway to the spiritual world of rebirth. This image of woman is revered because it is known for justice retribution. On the other hand, Azuonye maintains further that the powerless image of woman refers to the negatively portrayed woman who is seen as inferior to man. This type of image includes the morally debased woman, and the stupid woman. Azuonye argues that the latter image of woman is a feminist import and that it came along with the patriarchal nuances of the west.

Also, Damian U. Opata highlights the powerfulness and powerlessness of woman in the ambivalent pair of woman and the Deity. According to him, an Igbo proverb says, "*Onye maa negbugi ne nwanyi gbur* - One who is not killed by Deity is killed by woman" (95). In the analysis of the proverb, Opata posits that woman shares the same trait of killing as Deity. While Deity kills to punish for abomination and other

atrocities that tend toward revealing the personality of the Deity, a woman, according to the Igbo, kills through starvation and bad cooking, through luring a man away from his family, through betrayal, by bewitching someone with charms and through concealed adultery. Opata concludes that since woman just like the Deity is capable of inflicting destruction on a man, man apportions the same fear which he gives the Deity to woman (99). Opata posits that the proverb serves as a warning for men that what is dear to them can harm them. Therefore, they should always be cautious when dealing with a woman (107). He observes, however, that most of the time the Igbo fail to put into consideration the "sublime, honourable, admirable, wonderful and imposing characteristics of woman;" instead they reiterate the "dangerous" and "capricious" aspects.

Nnadozie Inyama (1992) explores the rebel image of woman in Igbo. The rebellious woman is against the tradition on the occasion of choice of spouse. Inyama examines the representation of this proposition in the "rebel girl motif" in the West African folklore. According to him, the motif is always depicted in the "damsel in distress" which is a key motif in quest narratives. The stories are always woven around a very beautiful lady who rejects all her townsmen and looks out for the perfect gentleman in a stranger. In most cases, the strangers turn out to be mysterious beings, monsters, who borrow human body parts to make themselves attractive. It is these set of men that such women admire and immediately fall in love with, at their own detriment.

Inyama, however, argues that the "rebel girl motif" could have been an offshoot of feminism and liberalism which expose women to being in conflict with the traditional pattern of marriage. He also posits that the conflict most often end against the lady because the tradition is keen on retaining its best products. However, he also observes that some writers manipulate the rebel girl pattern to suit whatever opinion they want to express. In other words, some writers allow their heroines to excel in the challenges that come as a result of their defiance of traditional lores and customs. Inyama concludes his investigation by proposing that a woman who marries across borders paves the way for both personal and national development since her exposure to other cultures contributes to her social improvement.

For Ambrose Monye (1992), the Igbo folklore celebrates the woman as a mother symbol because she takes care of both her children and husband. In other words, panegyric songs are performed to commend women for their remarkable roles while satirical songs are also displayed to lampoon them for the societal ills they commit. According to him, the panegyrics celebrate mothers during marriage for their ability to raise virtuous daughters who attract the attention of suitors. Such songs are also directed to the bride because of her untainted beauty and character until adulthood. She is also praised for "making her parents and community proud for accepting to settle down to procreate and train her children" (66). The panegyrics, therefore, suggest that characters with character traits exalted should be passed on to the next generation. On the other hand, satirical songs are directed against sexual proximity, pre-marital pregnancy, infidelity, improper training of children and poor management of husband. In conclusion of his study, Monye admonishes:

> And in no other setting is the need to watch how human beings as greater than in rural communities where everyone is his brother's or sister's keeper, where whatever the individual does affects his/her next door neighbour. Since society either gains or loses from the conduct of the individuals in it, there is a need for people to concern themselves with commenting on what their neighbours do day in day out (74).

Christine Ohale (1992) also shares the same opinion as Monye that women use satirical performances to lampoon the bad behaviour of their fellow women. In addition to Monye's thesis, Ohale holds that satirical performances are only the occasions where women express themselves freely. In other words, the dance steps and their diction suggest crudity as they call all the sexual organs by their native names as against their western versions which may be mild to the senses. According to Ohale, satirical performances also mean moments of freedom for women.

For Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, women in Igbo folklore represent custodians of tradition. They tell folktales and inculcate core values of the land in their children and youth, thereby ensuring that the values are passed on from one generation to another. In her argument, Adimora-Ezeigbo upholds that such nurturing tasks are not alien to women because, naturally, they always seem closest to children.

Among all the areas covered by the researchers above, it is observable that the image of women as exploiters of men in Igboland has not been critically examined. This study, therefore, investigates this image of women in Nsukka-Igbo oral performance and Adichie's novel in the written questioning the need for employment of the image of women as exploiters of men into the texts. In the exploration of the texts, this study will experiment with the "rebel girl" motif of Inyiama.

Woman as Exploiters of Men in Lejja *Ọmaba* Chant

Ọmaba Chant or *Egara Ọmaba* in Lejja dialet is an all-male-composition and performance displayed in the Nsukka - Igbo extraction. It refers to the half-sung-half-spoken utterances that contain elements of praise for not only *Ọmaba* and his qualities but also for his participants. *Ọmaba* is an ancestral deity of fertility among the Igbo *Ọmaba* socio-cultural group in Enugu State of Nigeria, This chant, which is often ritualistic and sacred, is only heard when *Ọmaba* is on earth (*maa nọ n'alə*) in all the Igbo *Ọmaba* cultural areas. There are many other variants of *Ọmaba* chant performances such as; those performed by an individual for the community during the eves of the deity's Fall and Departure festivals, an individual's chant to *Ọmaba* as it passes, and *Ọmaba's* chants in praise of itself, and all of them are geared towards the praise of the deity. Embedded in the chants are tropes of stories that depict the exploitative nature of woman in Lejja town. The chant-like stories are seen in the appendix section.

In appendix 1 (story one), the image of the woman as a manipulator of the innocent male persona is observable. The man's innocence is suggested by the fact that it is the woman that presents the offer to him. And the offer is becoming his partner after he had saved her parents from drowning. The male persona agrees to the terms

and performs the heroic role only for the woman to turn around and reject him. The persona's voice is that of disappointment and dejection at the betrayal of the terms of agreement by the woman.

For the woman folk, the portrayal of woman in the story above is negative and derogatory since it is aimed at making the woman appear inferior to men. In other words, the story must come from a patriarchal system which is bent on relegating woman to the background tradition On the other hand, the men see woman as unreliable. They therefore use the image to depict the feelings of powerlessness, depression, frustration and anxiety men pass through in the hands of woman when it comes to emotional relationships. These feelings are captured in the Lejja proverb analysed by Opata (1992) which says: "Whom the deity is not killed, is killed by a woman." In Lejja, the analogy between the deity and woman as killers of men connotes stripping one off manhood as already mentioned. The story in the epic chant sounds a cautionary warning note to men on the power of woman; that no matter how financially and socially successful they may be, they are the weaker sex in the face of being controlled by a woman. The persona's anxiety over that mindset is palpable in the story.

Appendix 2 (second story) "*Nẹ Nna nya Eze Agbaa nya Ẹba"* highlights the power of woman to re-direct a man's destiny. The persona is observed to be manipulated off his royal entitlements because he is carried away by the sexual enticement of woman. The passion and voraciousness that accompany sexual escapades are deployed in the symbolic images of *Ọgbọnọ* soup" and "hot *fufu*," a special delicacy among the Nsukka people. . "*Ọgbọnọ soup*" is symbolic among the Nsukka people of Igbo extraction because it is believed it performs a purgative function. That is why the soup is among the post-natal meals prepared for women. The delicious soup, just as it purges out afterbirth residue in the woman's body, also flushes out the persona's heirloom from him. The persona regrets the loss of his identity and inheritance because of his appetite for sex and woman's affection. Also, the soup's slimy nature makes it stretch and drop when it is eaten, and that is why some other tribes in Nigeria call it "*Draw soup*." The persona uses the image of the soup to represent the alluring power of woman, which is magnetic. He further confirms his powerlessness and perceives himself as a victim of "*Ọgbọnọ* soup" which represents woman. The infusion of this story in the *Ọmaba* chant is to warn men of the bitter consequences of being carried away by uncontrolled passion or intersexual relationships. In other words, they should be calculative and careful when being in love. The persona lastly jeers at women by contrasting them with the world of dogs. Among the Lejja people, the dog's image connotes "no permanent residence." The dog, after it has been sold, continues to go back to its former owner's house; therefore, the woman neither belongs to her husband nor her father. If she commits any offence in her husband's house, she is sent back to her father's house. On the other hand, once a woman is married off, her opinion ceases to be sought in her father's house.

Again, in Appendix 3 (story 3), the persona is manipulated into having a sexual intercourse with an unnamed referent. Although the text's persona is non-gendered,

line seven suggests that the seducer is a woman because she asks the man to "*sher tiyi*," which roughly transliterates as "bring it and slot in." The image captured is "something elongated that could be fitted into a hole."

The innocence of the persona is portrayed in the first and second lines: */Nenya jeko nke nye / Ọ sə nya, nya gata hụma/I was going on my own/ and /She told me to come and see/*. The intention of the invitation was not made known to the seduced because he is told to come and see something. He comes only to be manipulated into getting into bed and having sex with the seducer. The persona becomes a victim to the captivating power of the seducer. The story represents the manipulative power of woman and a situation where the woman detours the intention and the destination of the persona.

In the three stories above, the powerful nature of the woman is portrayed with a sense of negativity by the menfolk with the intention of controlling its excesses. In other words, a woman who manifests such characteristics should be handled with extreme caution.

Woman as Exploiters of Men in *Americanah*

Chimamanda Adichie deploys this exploitative image of woman extensively in her novel, *Americanah*, in the exploration of the conflict between feminism and traditional/societal values. Adichie, in contradiction to the menfolk's negative perception of exploitation by the woman, reverses societal ethics by using it positively as a tool of power to depict the heroine, Ifemelu, and other female characters.

Americanah is a replication of the "rebel girl motif" in the Igbo folklore. According to Inyama, (1992), this motif is:

> A well-known Ibo folktale which tells about the village girl who is so beautiful and conceited that she will not look at, let alone marry, any of her teeming local admirers. Neither threats nor pleas will make her accept any of the young men around. One day, to her boundless surprise, a very handsome stranger appears in her village, and she falls uncontrollably in love with him. No warnings would make her change her mind about eloping with this seemingly handsome stranger. The fact that no one knows where he has come from, or even that other people feel that there is something uncomfortable or even sinister- in all custom and decorum, she throws caution to the wind and goes with the stranger (109).

Inyama argues that this is the most frequently adapted tale-types by African writers who manipulate the motif to suit their opinions on social trends. Although the major preoccupation of the "rebel girl motif" is the manifestation of nature's revolt for loss of its best products; another very important aspect represented by the motif is the traditional restraint imposed on the female member of society. Based on the conclusions of Inyama, this paper explores *Americanah* in contrast with the latter aspect of the motif, which portrays a conflict between the female character and societal traditional values.

In *Americanah*, Adichie employs exploitation as a survival mechanism for the female folk in their quest for survival, identity and economic empowerment in times

of scarce resources. Exploitation in the novel is portrayed as a positive value because it effects a positive change in the lives of the characters and their close relatives. The novel, in order to achieve its success, represents a negation of the traditional pattern of narration whereby good triumphs over evil. In other words, the cosmopolitan modern values triumph over the traditional values to justify the saying that "the end justifies the means." In *Americanah*, therefore, there is a suggestion that exploitation is an instrument of power which the female folks use to excel and attain their life goals.

Ifemelu, the heroine of the novel, bears the major brunt of male exploitation in the text. She manipulates Obinze's emotions just because he is in love with her. Ifemelu is a character created by Adichie to conflict with the traditional stereotype of women whose priority is to selflessly please their partners. In other words, Ifemelu is Adichie's experimentation of women who are guided by their own volitions and not constrained by the traditional moral standards or expectations from them.

Ifemelu, the only child of her parents, is raised up in Lagos, Nigeria, without any gender restrictions. She socializes with friends, attends school, competes with her male counterparts and mediates in family matters. She is never saddled with such female roles as cleaning the house and cooking. In such a gender-free atmosphere, she is able to create a niche for her future. In other words, based on self-interest she solely decides the relationship partner she picks as well as the character she should exhibit to sustain such a relationship and the university she will attend.

Obinze, Ifemelu's partner in the novel, a professor's son, also shares the same gender-free background with Ifemelu as he cooks and cleans the house and helps out his widowed mother whenever he can. This similar upbringing shared by the two characters suggests the spark that ignited their relationship when they meet. Obinze's mother, who works at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, relocates to Lagos state as a result of the pressure an altercation with a male professor put her in. It is as a result of this movement with her son, Obinze, that fate brings him and Ifemelu together. Obinze's choice for Ifemelu is not because of her beauty because the intention of their classmate, Dasilva, prior to the party which they attended, was to match-make Obinze with the school's beauty queen, Ginika, the half caste. Obinze, however, falls for Ifemelu because of her intelligence and good reading habit. He recalls that, on one occasion, he meets her clutching one of the James Hardly Chase novels. Also, Ifemelu's overwhelming knowledge of proverbs endeared her to Obinze. As a result of this unique display of versatility, Obinze appears glued to Ifemelu, never hurting her feelings and very eager to groom the relationship to marriage. With his advice, Ifemelu leaves for America as a result of the incessant strike of the lecturers in their university. She agrees, on the condition that she would make plans for Obinze to join her as soon as possible. In America, things turn out contrary to Ifemelu's thought and, in the struggle to survive the harsh environment, the flourishing relationship is severed by Ifemelu. All efforts by Obinze to get through to her appear futile.

In the novel, the only times that Ifemelu makes attempts to get in touch with Obinze after the truncated relationship are such times that their classmate, Ranyinudo, gives her updates on Obinze's progresses in life. The first is when he travels to En-

gland, a journey he embarks on with his mother to save him from the devastation of losing Ifemelu as well as an American visa. Ifemelu never thought that Obinze would make that breakthrough in life without her knowledge. Another one is when she gets wind of Obinze's wealth; she immediately starts nursing the dream of coming back to Nigeria where Obinze is. Ifemelu convincingly seems to be battling with two things; the thought that Obinze was getting married and, as Ranyinudo put it, "Meanwhile o he has serious money. See what you missed" (14). And she begins to scheme her way back into Obinze's life even when she knows full well that he is married and has moved on with his life. Another report from Ranyinudo about an encounter with Obinze at the Palms Mall with his daughter that he, "was looking so clean and his daughter is so fine" pushes Ifemelu to send an email to Obinze after five years of break in communication. As she writes to him, she cautiously chooses her words in order to appeal to Obinze's emotions. By calling him "Ceiling," the romantic pet name they started calling each other after an incident in their room at the university, there is the suggestion that she intends to re-ignite the already dead relationship. She writes:

> Ceiling, *kedu*? Hope all is well with work and family. Ranyinudo said she ran into you some time ago and that you now have a child! Proud papa. Congratulations. I recently decided to move back to Nigeria. Should be in Lagos in a week. Would love to keep in touch. Take care. Ifemelu. (19)

Just as she envisaged, her diction performs the intended magic because Obinze recollects that before he got married she never addressed him as such. She even called him by his name and verbally flaunted her new acquaintance at him. Consequently,after the emails from Ifemelu have become constant, Obinze's attitude and countenance change towards his wife- Kosi. Kosi, whom Obinze had really fallen in love to fill the gap of Ifemelu in his life, suddenly becomes boring. And everything about her is gradually substituted with constant nostalgic childhood memories of Ifemelu and their university relationship. Obinze already has strong reasons that ought to make him forget the relationship for good, for he thinks that "he could have died during the five-year silence and she would not have known" and she does not sound remorseful when she comes back as "her tone is the same as though she had not wounded him, and left him bleeding for more than five years."

Ifemelu exploits Obinze's weakness for her to her advantage without any compromise about wreaking havoc on an already established family (Obinze, Kosi and their daughter). She manipulates him against his made-up mind to move on with his life and with another woman. She lures him into the world of adultery which is against the Igbo tradition; thereby, killing the man in him, according to Opata (1992). She also uses Obinze as a cure for her depression as it is stated in the text that she:

> hates when Obinze wore relationship so boldly, like a brightly coloured shirt. Sometimes he worried that she was too happy. She would sink into moodiness, and snap at Obinze, or be distant. And her joy would become a restless thing, flapping its wings inside her, as though looking for an opening to fly away (63).

Also in the novel, Nneoma, Obinze's cousin whom he stays with after his deportation from England, is independent and seems well-to-do by the societal standard.

Giving a description of her, the narrator says: "She had thick palmed, capable hands and many business interests. She travelled to Dubai to buy gold, to China to buy woman's clothing, and lately, she had become a distributor for a frozen chicken company" (23). Nneoma reveals the source of her wealth as she plans to introduce Obinze to a chief whom she thinks can help him out of his present predicament. She says to Obinze one day:

> I know this very rich man, Chief. The man chased and chased me, eh, hut I refused. He has a serious problem with women and he can give somebody AIDS. But you know, these men, the one woman that says no to them is the one that they don't forget. So from time to time, he will call me and sometimes I go and greet him. He even helped me with capital to start over my business after those children of Satan stole my money last year. He still thinks that one day I will agree to him. *Ha, o di egwu,* for where? I will take you to him. Once he is in a good mood, the man can be very generous. He knows everybody in the country. Maybe he will give us a note for a managing director somewhere (23-24).

This excerpt is quoted at length because it highlights that Nneoma exploits Chief as a result of his doting affection for her. She knows that she is not ready to surrender herself to Chief for sexual satisfaction, yet she sees herself as bait to attract Chief's generosity. She also uses Chief to get connected to highly placed people - a habit that makes her more established in the society. Obinze, her cousin and the hero of the text, also gains from Chief's benevolence. Chief believes that nobody in the country has an honest means of livelihood, as a result of hunger, and he offers Obinze a shady business idea of preparing a proposal for the privatization of the bankrupt National Farm Support Corporation. Obinze shrewdly executes the business plan by following Nneoma's dubious advice to: "undervalue the properties and make it look as if you are following the due process. You acquire the property, sell off half to pay your purchase price and you are in business" (26). Obinze even brings his Caucasian friend and colleague from England to stand in as his general manager. Although Obinze flouts moral values to become wealthy, he gains societal popularity and admiration.

This societal acceptance can be contrasted with the trickster motif where the trickster's mischiefs and dishonest escapades are termed smartness. In other words, Obinze's smartness to fame justifies the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest in the novel, because he preys on the failed system in his country in order to succeed.

Another character in the novel who exhibits the exploitative role is Aunty Uju, Ifemelu's cousin. Uju is introduced in the novel as the "Thirteen and pimply-faced" girl from the village, whom Ifemelu took to on first sight (53). She has come to the city to live with Ifemelu's family not only to keep Ifemelu company as the only child but also because Ifemelu's father wanted to take up another responsibility since he has just one child. Uju had always had a dream of owning a private clinic in Lagos Island after training as a doctor. Because of this, she refuses to relocate to America like her fellow students who left as a result of incessant strikes by the academic union in her university.

Ifemelu sees Uju's ex-boyfriend, Olujimi, as a "nice-looking and smooth-voiced" young man, who "glistened with quiet polish" (80). But because Uju has a dream which she passionately wants to fulfill, Olujimi lacks the immediate potential to take her to such a height. Uju tells Ifemelu, "I outgrew him." Uju rather falls for a married army "The General," whom she met at a friend's wedding. The General builds a duplex for Uju at Dolphin Estate and, according to her, "the military hospital in Victoria Ireland has no doctor vacancy but The General made them create one for me" (45). Uju does not mince words as she affirms that power is her major attraction in The General. She says: "I did not sleep with him because I wanted something. Ah, this thing called power. I was attracted to him even with his teeth like Dracula" (77). Apparently, Uju... exploits The General's powerful position in the army to attain her life goal and expec-tations.

Again, among Uju's friends who visit her because she is The General's mistress is Adesuwa. She has a piece of land in Abuja, the capital city, which she got by dating the head of state. Uche, who is also dating a "famously wealthy Hausa man," was bought a boutique in Surulere (82). Uche reveals further: "I told him he must buy it in my name o. Ah, I knew he would not bring the money unless I said somebody was sick. No now, he doesn't know I opened the account" (82).

Uju's ill-gotten wealth and connection make a positive impact in the lives of people around her. Although Ifemelu's father does not support Uju's lifestyle with The General, he cannot reject the crumbs from his largesse. He is unable to pay his house rent for two years after being sacked for not calling his boss "mummy." Uju comes to his rescue after Ifemelu had told her about the landlord's threat of eviction because of the accumulation of unpaid rent. It is stated thus in the novel:

> At the flat, Aunt Uju handed Ifemelu's father a plastic bag swollen with cash. "It is rent for two years," she said, with an embarrassed casualness, and then made a joke about the hole in his singlet. She did not look him in the face as she spoke and he did not look her in the face as he thanked her. (79)

By accepting the money from Uju, Ifemelu's father saves himself the shame of being sent back to the village. His life and dignity are restored. Before receiving the money, he was not only sliding into depression as a result of the financial downturn in his life but also because his wife had begun to challenge his authority as a breadwinner of the house. It is pertinent to note that his refusal to be exploited by a woman in his office put him in the present condition. Ifemelu's father, therefore, represents those people in society whose identities are compromised and exploited because of poverty.

Also, Ifemelu's eventual identity is reconstructed by her relocation to the United States, which easily happened because of Uju. The General's sudden death paved the way for the pregnant Uju's impromptu exit to America. The wrath of The General's family appeared unbearable for Uju and she escapes for the safety of her life and that of her unborn child. The movement awakens the need for and facilitates Ifem's travel out of the country. Ifemelu applies for a scholarship in America because Uju is there to host her. Also, Uju, knowing that Ifem's movement to America would relieve her of the burden of taking care of her son, pushes Ifem on to move over. Ifemelu's new

experience and the struggle for survival in the strange land sharpen her perception as she constantly learns from her endeavours.

Ifemelu's mother is so carried away by Uju's new status that she ironically refers to the situation as miraculous. Because of what she enjoys from Uju's escapades with The General, she justifies immoral activities. She shuns calling The General derogatory names like gigolo or flirt but, instead, calls him "Uju's mentor." She prays for him thus:

> Heavenly father, I command you to bless Uju's mentor. May his enemies never triumph over him!" Or she would say, "We cover Uju's mentor with the precious blood of Jesus!" and she usually peddles the story that "The General wanted to be a doctor when he was young, and so now he helps doctors. God is really using him in people's lives" (44-45).

She goes to the extent of making the neighbours feel that Uju is lucky to have a man who gives her a car loan. The irony is portrayed in this conversation between Ifemelu and a neighbour;

> Chetachi, who lived upstairs, asked Ifemelu, "Your mum said Aunty Uju's mentor also gave her a car loan for the car?
>
> "Yes!"
>
> "Eh, Aunty Uju is lucky o" (45).

Ifemelu's mum, as depicted above, represents the sycophants of the society who choose to tell lies with shamelessness because of personal benefits.

Another character that exhibits the exploitative influence on man in the novel is Ranyinudo, Ifemelu's secondary school classmate. Ranyinudo is a character in the novel that plays the major role of re-establishing the truncated relationship between the hero, Obinze and Ifemelu, the heroine of the text. She occasionally updates Ifemelu on Obinze's new influential status as well as his financial achievements. It is as a result of her stories that Ifemelu decides to move back to Nigeria to execute her plans of working her way back to Obinze. On their way back, after picking Ifemelu up from the airport, she tells Ifemelu:

> And I met someone o. He saw me when I was waiting outside for the mass to end. It was so hot, my foundation was melting on my face and I know I looked like a Zombie, but he still came to me! That's a good sign. I think this one is a serious husband material. Did I tell you that my mother was saying novenas to end my relationship when I was dating Ibrahim? At last she will not have a heart attack with this one. His name is Ndudi. Cool name, abi? You can't get more Igbo than that. And you should have seen his watch! He's into oil. His business card has Nigerian offices (387).

From the excerpt, there are suggestions that Ranyinudo's major intention is to use Ndudi as a launch pad into achieving her societal needs as a woman. Her major interest as depicted is on the material aspect of the man as she had weighed the potential man's pocket from the quality of his watch, oil business and business card. Also,

because of the high possibility of the man being wealthy, she thinks him good enough for marriage. Her interest is certainly not on the man's character but his money. Again, she also tells Ifemelu about Don, another male friend of hers, a married man and a chief executive who buys her business-class tickets to London. Ranyinudo confides in Ifemelu:

> I have feelings for him, I won't deny it, but I want to marry him and he knows that. I used to think maybe I should have a child for him but look at Uche Okafor, remember her from Nsukka? She had a child for the managing director of Hale Bank and the man told her to go to hell, that he is not the father, and now she is left with raising a child alone. Na wa (389).

From Ranyinudo's utterance above, it could be deduced that her men only serve the purpose of providing her needs, things that are above her standard in the society. This false personality upgrade which she pursues is also suggested on another occasion where she tells Ifemelu, "I really want Don to change this car. He has been promising for the past three months. I need a jeep. Do you see how terrible the roads are?" (390)

Sister Ibinabo also wields her own exploitative power in the novel. She plays the role of guardian to the youth in Ifemelu's church. She is viewed as so powerful that she lays her hands on visa applications to ensure that they are accepted at the embassy. The novel tells us more about her:

> SISTER IBINABO WAS very powerful and because she pretended to wear her power lightly, it only made her more so. The pastor, it was said, did whatever she asked him. It was not clear why; some said she had started the church with him, others that she knows a terrible secret from his past… (50)

Conclusion

The examination of gender exploitation in the two texts, *Ọmaba* chant and *Americanah,* reveals that men are the victims of oppression. Also, from the analysis of most female characters in *Americanah,* there is a suggestion that the exploiting image of women against men in the text represents the feminine power to achieve financial break through and personal goals in life. The study thereby validates the claim that female characters are oppressors and the fear of the menfolk against the women's mysterious nature is also justified. The exploiting image of women as used in both texts, therefore, is a precautionary note to men about their affairs with women.

Appendices

Selections from the *Ọmaba* chant performed in the *Ụmụakpọ Okiti, Ụmụakpọ* Village Square of Lejja town on *Orie* night, July the 17th, 2012. The dialect differs from the standard Igbo version spoken and used in pedagogy.

Appendix 1 (Story 1)

Nẹ Nya Jeko Nye Ije Nye o!	-	-	-	*Jereke-Jeke-o*
Nwaanyi shi n'aga ụzọ fəta!	-	-	-	*Jereke-Jeke-o*

Nẹ nya zọfəta nne nye nya dərə nye o! - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Nẹ nya zọfəta nna nya nya dərə nye o - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Nẹ nya azọfəta nne nye bịa je dərə e Ọ jụ - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Nẹ nya azọfəta nna nya bịa je dərə e Ọ jụ - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Jereke--- Jeke o Jereke---Jeke o - - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Transliteration in English

I was going on my own journey o! - - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

A woman came out from the corner of the road *Jereke-Jeke-o*

If I rescued her mother that I should take her o *Jereke-Jeke-o*

If I rescued her father that I should take her o *Jereke---e-Jeke-o*

I rescued the mother and came to take her and she refused) *Jereke---e-Jeke-o*

I rescued the father and came to take her and she refused) *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Jereke--- Jeke o Jereke---Jeke o - - - *Jereke-Jeke-o*

Appendix 2 (Story 2)

Nẹ Nna Nya Eze Agbaa Nya Ẹba - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*

Nẹ oheyi ọkụ anarə nya ẹba - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*

Nẹ ụtara ọkụ anarə nya ẹba - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*

Ụwa ndiom ụwa ngəta - - - - *Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke*

Transliteration in English

My Father, the king, has conferred on Me the Royal Rites Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

The hot Ọgbọnọ soup has taken my rites from me - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

The hot foo-foo has taken my rites from me - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

The world of woman, the world of dogs - - - Ngba eba-Ngba-huyereke

Appendix 3 (Story 3)

Ne Nya Jeko Nke Nye

Nẹ nya jeko nke nye- - - - - - *Hmmm*

Ọ sə nya, nya gata hụma - - - - *Hmmm*

Nẹ nya agar hụma

Ọ sə nya nya shueshie ẹkwa nya- - - - - Hmmm

Nẹ nya e shueshie ẹkwa nya

Ọ sə nya nyigote Ogodo - - - - - Hmmm

Nẹ nya enyigote Ogodo

Ọ sə nya, nya sher tiyi - - - - - - Hmmm

Nẹ nya e sher tiy

Ọ sə nya nya dkwọ kwọkwọ - - - - Hmmm

Eee! Nwanyị dkwọ kwọ kwọ - - - -

Transliteration in English

I was going on my own journey - - - - Hmmm

S/he told me to come and see- - - - - Hmmm

I went to see - - - - - - - Hmmm

S/he told me to climb up to the bed - - - Hmmm

I climbed up to the bed - - - - - - Hmmm

S/he told me to untie my wrapper - - - Hmmm

I untied my wrapper - - - - - - Hmmm

She told me to put it in - - - - - - Hmmm

I put it in - - - - - - - Hmmm

She said dkwo kwo kwo

Eee! Woman of dkw kwo kwo

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