

ORAL NARRATIVES AND THE AFRICAN WOMAN'S DISTRESS: APPRAISING INTER(INTRA)-GENDER HOSTILITIES IN URHOBO FOLKTALES

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Abstract

Representation of gender problems in modern African literature has received critical attentions, especially at the level of inter-gender scuffles, stereotypes, injustice and misconception of gender roles. This, however, is not the case with African indigenous arts, particularly oral narratives, which are though permeated by different textures of gender themes, have not earned much scholarly interest. Since the African society is predominantly patriarchal, discourses on gender constructs primarily identify cases of male chauvinism, holding masculinity solely responsible for gender oppression. Folktale, an indigenous art-form that performs a utilitarian and an entertaining role in pre-modern African societies, conveys socio-cultural experiences of the people, particularly the social construction of gender subjects. This essay, therefore, examines reflections of inter-gender and intra-gender issues in selected folktales among the Urhobo of Nigeria. Three Urhobo folktales, Okpakemete and Omotekorho, Ovwaha Oghanhanre Na (The Precious Bead) and Omote Okpan Na (The Calabash-Girl) were purposively selected, tape-recorded, transcribed, translated and subjected to qualitative literary analysis. The critical discussion of the tales was anchored on Frank Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski's Functionalist theory, which underscores the social function of folktales; and Womanist theory, an African variant of feminism, which decries radical, separatist agenda, and privileges gender parity for peaceful coexistence. The critical evaluation of the tales shows instances of gender oppression and hostile manifestations against the African woman, which are evident in husband-wife and wife-co-wife relationships. The selected texts support the claim that episodes of inter-gender and intra-gender subjugation and cruelty resonate in Urhobo oral narratives, specifically folktales.

Keywords: Gender discourse; Oral narratives; Urhobo folktale; Functionalist theory; Womanism

Introduction

African indigenous artistic tradition, like the written counterpart, carries through the people's socio-cultural and historical realities. Since the oral tradition dwells in the people's root, their cultural orientation, identities, ethical and socio-historical experiences resonate in it. This implies that the wealth of the people's

beliefs, customs and values are entwined in their oral artistic tradition. It is, therefore, pertinent to note here that African oral narratives cannot be separated from the socio-cultural experiences and sensibilities of the folks that harbour them. The social significance of oral literature has been observed by scholars of oral literature such as, Isidore Okpewho (1992) and F. B. O. Akporobaro (2006) and Ruth Finnegan (1970; 2012). The altruistic value of African oral arts has been highlighted by different African scholars. For instance, Soyinka (1968) admits that, “the artist has always functioned in the African society as the record(er) of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision of his own time...” (21). On a similar note, Ayi Kwei Armah (1984) declares: “As far back as our written and unwritten records go, it has been the prime destiny of the serious African artist to combine the craft of creativity with the search for regenerative values” (35). Philip Adedotun Ogundeji (2000) clarifies this point of view thus:

In Nigeria and Africa as a whole, the point has been made by scholars that the idea of art for its own sake is irrelevant and unacceptable. Art...cannot but be functional, however aesthetic or entertaining they may be. The context of African art is an integral part of it. Ritual, therefore, insofar it has aesthetic qualities besides its socio-religious functions, can be seen and considered as a type of performing art (3).

On this note, Frank Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski’s Functionalist theory is adopted in this study to examine the social function of the selected folktales. Apparently, the three genres of oral literature, like the written counterpart, bear this air of functionality. Like Western literary categorization into poetry, prose and drama, African oral literature is classified into oral poetry (songs, proverbs and riddles), oral narrative (folktales, myths, and legends) and traditional festival drama (see Finnegan, 1970, 2012; Okpewho, 1992 and Akporobaro, 2006). Using the foregoing as a benchmark, this paper examines indices of inter-gender and intra-gender injustice in three Urhobo folktales. The Urhobo occupy mainly the Western and Northern fringes of the Niger River Delta region of Nigeria’s present Delta State. Large pockets of Urhobo people are also found in the contiguous states of Bayelsa, Rivers, and Edo and in many Yoruba speaking areas such as Ife, Lagos, and Okitipupa. Large communities of Urhobo migrants have settled all over Nigeria, including Jos, Kano, Maiduguri and Yola as in neighbouring countries like Ghana, Liberia and Cote d’Ivoire (Ojaide, 2003:11). The term Urhobo is used to represent both the language and the people. There are varieties of oral artistic traditions among the Urhobo. Folktale is one of such prominent artistic heritage of the Urhobo.

Folktales are very important among the Urhobo. They are light-hearted narratives that are primarily meant for entertainment and the teaching of morality. As a

functional artistic tradition, folktales reflect the Agricultural and social life of the people who tell them, and they are centered on the universal problems of man (Akporobaro, 2006). Thematically, folktales are classified into the following: trickster tales, rescue tales, dilemma tales, historical tales and heroic tales. Here, effort is made to examine three tales among the Urhobo namely, *Ovwarha Oghanhanre Na* (“The Precious Bead”), *Omote Okpan Na* (“The Calabash-Girl”) and “Okpakemete and Omotekorho”. These tales are tape-recorded, transcribed, translated and critically investigated to highlight the indicators of inter and intra-gender hostilities that reverberate in them.

Traces of inter-gender and intra-gender oppression are found in the tales, “Okpakemete and Omotekorho”, “The Calabash Girl” and “The Precious Bead”. By Inter-gender oppression refers to gender oppression that is manifested by the men-folk on the women-folk. Patriarchal chauvinism places the woman in a position of inferiority and subjects her to traditional stereotypes that denigrate her humanity. In many indigenous societies, women are seen as tools used by the men for at their own wishes and desires. Such unjust interaction between the male and the female genders are examined in the tales as indices of inter-gender oppression. On the other hand, intra-gender oppression refers to the oppression of women by their fellow women. Yetunde Akorede (2011: 99) confirms the existence of intra-gender conflict in African folktales:

The conflictual relationships between step-mothers and their step-children; especially step daughters have been depicted in many traditional African tales. Like the co-wife tales, there is usually tension, hostility and open confrontations in the relationships between step-mothers and their step-children.

In order to effectively realize the ideas in this study, the womanist theoretical framework and the functionalist theory of oral literature are adopted. Womanism, as a theory, evolved as a result of the deficiencies of Feminism which could not cater for the subjugated African woman. A group of gender scholars in Africa argue that Feminism merely projects the yearning of middle class white women, and that its radical perspective is against the African structure of morality and normality. In other words, some tenets of Feminism assert practices like lesbianism, separatism and radicalism, which are abominated in different African societies. According to Kolawole (1997), African women “are not seeking to replace subjugation or separatism with another. African women yearn for a society in which they can assert their innate resourcefulness by rejecting the fetters of tradition and any aspect of socialization that puts them at a disadvantage” (p. 30). Ogunyemi’s (1988) definition of Womanism underscores its relevance to the African cultural root:

womanism is black centred; it is accomodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism;

unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. It is also interested in communal wellbeing...(65)

The tenets of Womanism above fit into the critical content of this study. They help in accounting for the gender issues expressed in the selected folktales. Significantly too, the discussion of the folktales will highlight injustices done to women by their fellow women. This will correct the erroneous ideas that man is solely responsible for gender oppression, which the feminist approach privileges. Perhaps, most of the gender conflicts that bring about unhealthy relationship in the contemporary society are manifestations of what our indigenous cultures and literatures possess. Consciously or unconsciously, we convey these experiences in our actions and dispositions. Apart from inter-gender coercion, there are literary representations of intra-gender hostilities and conflicts; these, however, have not witnessed adequate critical attention. Some of such conflicts are between co-wives; mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law; spinsters and married women over spinsters' possession of their fellow women's husbands. In all these experiences, within our cultural domains, the man takes the blame as a polygamist and a flirt (colloquially, "a womanizer"). This article, therefore, attempts an objective appraisal of gender conflicts as explored in Urhobo folk narratives.

Narrating Inter/Intra-Gender Oppression and Hostilities in the Folktales under Study

There are varying cases of inter/intra-gender hostilities in the tales examined in this study. The folktale, *Okpakemete and Omotekoro* is centered on Omotekoro, a very beautiful girl from a humble background, who is adored by all and sundry. The adoration she earns from the community engenders Okpakemete's jealousy. As a high class girl that dresses flamboyantly, Okpakemete wonders why Omotekoro, a poverty-stricken girl with tattered clothes, is eulogized by the community. As the name implies, Okpakemete is the oldest girl in the community. Owing to her age, she occupies a prestigious but ridiculous position as the head of all the spinsters in the community. She, therefore, plots to kill Omotekoro, but all her efforts to exterminate her prove abortive. Okpakemete, therefore, makes an announcement that all the girls of marriageable age will march to meet their suitors. A sacred camp is arranged for this feast. As it is characteristic of such *ohware* (gathering of brides), the girls are expected to dress flamboyantly; anyone who does not dress to the required standard will be maimed by the gods of fashions, who are in charge of the screening during the girls' procession to the *ohware*. Knowing that Omotekoro, owing to her poor economic status, cannot afford to dress to the required standard, Okpakemete goes ahead to condemn her to the gods of fashion—the gods of wrapper, blouse, scarf, shoes, hair-make, to eliminate her once she gets to them. But as fate will have it, as

Omotekoro arrives there, she wins the sympathy of the gods through her melancholic song that conveys Okpakemete's ill-jealousy against her. All the gods contribute to her dressing from their stores of fashions, and Omotekoro arrives at the *ohware*, the most gorgeously dressed bride. Before she arrived at the *ohware*, all the other girls had taken their spouses and had long forgotten Omotekoro, whom Okpakemete had condemned to death.

However, one bachelor is left, and on seeing Omotekoro, he runs to embrace her, saying, "Here comes my wife". At this point, Okpakemete had frozen to the ground in confusion. The brides are to remain in the *ohware* for seven days before going with their spouses. Since Okpakemete is not tired of evil, she employs another avenue to disqualify Omotekoro from the *ohware*— she wakes up at night and urinates on Omotekoro's sleeping position; at dawn, she accuses Omotekoro of bedwetting. Nobody believes Omotekoro in her defence. Okpakemete does this till a fateful night that she is caught by one of the brides in the *ohware*. A man suggests that a lot should be cast to make for justice— a pit is dug and demarcated into two halves—one half is stuffed with money and jewelry; the other half, stuffed with varieties of dangerous snakes including pythons. The person, who commits the offence, is to fall on the side of snakes, while the innocent is to fall on the side of wealth and jewelry and they will be hers. Eventually, Okpakemete falls on the side of snakes and they consume her while Omotekoro falls on the side of wealth and this elevates her family from hardship.

What resonates in this folktale, *Okpakemete and Omotekoro*, is the issue of intra-gender oppression, which manifests through the character of Okpakemete. Okpakemete's hatred toward her fellow woman, Omotekoro, is simply because of Omotekoro's beauty and the praises she (Omotekoro) gets from people in the community. Through Okpakemete's utterances, the audience is exposed to the unhealthy jealousy which she manifests in the story: "I dress gorgeously and nobody admires me; here is Omotekoro who dresses tattered but adored by everyone". For this singular reason, she deceives Omotekoro to the forest so that she will have a chance to annihilate her without people knowing, but her efforts prove abortive.

When Okpakemete arranges for the *ohware*, Omotekoro's mother, who understands Okpakemete's antics, laments thus: "Eh! Okpakemete wants to kill my daughter now o. Ah! Wicked Okpakemete really wants to kill my daughter for me. How can I buy such expensive attires for you? Ah! Ah!". It is wise to note here that Okpakemete's behavior deviates from the tenets of Womanism. As an accommodationist approach, Womanism privileges harmonious relationship involving women, men and children (Ogunyemi, 1988: 66). Thus, if Okpakemete's ill-character against her fellow woman, Omotekoro, is

interrogated on the basis of the tenets of Womanism, she is exposed to us as a personification of gender oppression. She is not a womanist, because a womanist celebrates motherhood while insisting that women should be treated with more respect and that motherhood be valued rather than derogated (Sotunsa, 2008: 22). Her desperation is evident when she goes ahead to condemn Omotekoro before the gods of fashion: “one tattered-looking girl is coming. Kill her”. Though the gods agree to Okpakemete’s request, Omotekoro’s presentation of her side of the case in her despondent song, earns the sympathy of the gods. This takes us to another significant point— our gods are against gender oppression, and they do not support evil of any kind. One would recall that the only offence committed by Omotekoro is the fact that she is beautiful and meek. This is brought to the fore by the song she renders to the gods of fashion. To the god of wrapper, Omotekorho croons:

Edjo ome mwa	god of fashion
Edjo ome mwa	god of fashion
Je mi gue ker’unuvwe taye	please give me an opportunity to express
myself first	
Egiogho!	Egiogho!
Okpire cha	wood-fetcher would say
Mevwe ovo yovwiri—o	I am the most beautiful!
Egiogho!	Egiogho!
Okpeghwa cha	farmers would say
Mevwe ovo yovwiri—o	I am the most beautiful!
Egiogho!	Egiogho!
Oyovwe, yovwere	beauty, excellent beauty
Egiogho!	Egiogho!
Omiovwe, miovwere	ugliness, extreme ugliness
Egiogho!	Egiogho!

At the end of this rendition, the gods are baffled at Okpakemete’s wickedness. The god of wrapper asks with dismay: “What? Is this why she said I should wax you together with my textile? Don’t worry”. He gives Omotekoro an expensive wrapper. Thus, all the gods of fashion contribute greatly to her outfit at the end of her song-narration.

From the song above, we are made to understand that Omotekoro is very beautiful. This beauty however, transcends physical beauty— she is physically and morally endowed. This is why she is regarded in the song as “Beauty, excellent beauty”. Among the Urhobo, if a lady is regarded as possessing an excellent beauty, it implies that in addition to her physical attraction, she possesses good moral traits like modesty, chastity, neatness, industriousness and respect. Contrastingly, Okpakemete is the ugly type. She is not only physically ugly, but morally bankrupt. Even her name shows that she is the oldest girl in the

community. Why would she remain in her parents' house for so long? This justifies the fact that she possesses ugly characteristic traits that chase suitors away. Instead of identifying her faults to make amends, she nurses unhealthy envy towards her fellow innocent woman, Omotekoro.

However, it is interesting to note that justice is realized at the end when Okpakemete meets her fate. It is wise to note here that while Okpakemete's injustice against her his fellow woman rages on, it is the menfolk that resolve the issue and justice is reached at the end. These men, going by their actions, are conveniently labeled here as womanists. A chauvinist would take a hasty position that may be detrimental to both parties but the men that peopled the tale take a logical decision that leads to a comic resolution of the tale.

It is wise to add here that the praises for Omotekoro are basically geared towards her sexuality—her attractive build and beautiful face as well as her moral stance. Thus, Okpakemete's rage towards Omotekoro underscores her revulsion upon herself. This is because the popular idiom is that women are to organize themselves against patriarchal injustice but we have observed here, the case is different.

Intra-gender hostility is also evident in the *Calabash-Girl*. This tale is centered on a polygamist, who is troubled as a result of the inability of his wives to conceive. The man, therefore, takes his two wives to a medicine man who prepares a concoction with a calabash for them. He urges them to put the calabash on *ahanre* (a grill), stressing that the heat of the fire on the calabash will emit a very attractive aroma, and that they should not be tempted to eat it. However, on getting home, the first wife could not withstand the tempting aroma from the calabash. Ignoring the warnings of her co-wife, she eats from the calabash until she exhausts it. Eventually, they conceive; but sadly, the first wife gives birth to a baby girl in calabash form while the second wife gives birth to a beautiful baby girl in human form. When they get to marriageable age, the Calabash-Girl too tells her parents to lead her to Oba, her husband. When the maids lead her to the Oba, he actually accommodates her as a second wife. As custom will have it, all the maids return home, leaving behind the little maid. As the little maid cries of hunger to the Calabash-Girl, she assures the maid that she will provide food for her. Suddenly, the calabash turns violently and she breaks into a song:

Ememe rume ojarume	I, Rume, it's a great pain caused me
Umuruo!	Umuruo!
Ememe Rume ojarume	I Rume, it's a great pain caused me
Umuruo!	Umuruo!
Ememe Rume ojarume	I Rume, it's a great pain caused me
Inene kpe obo r'ughogho	mother went to meet a native doctor
Ememe Rume	I Rume

Ọbo r'ughogho kereegha-o	the native doctor counted the abominable
Ememe Rume	I Rume
Worie ototo dame-e	Don't eat the calabash
Ememe Rume	I Rume
Inene rię ototo dame	mother ate the calabash
Ememe Rume	I Rume
Ohwona me ruvwe	she deliberately caused me pains
Ememe Rume-o	I Rume
Inene meruvwe	mother deliberately caused me pain
Ememe Rume ojarume	I Rume, it's a great pain caused me

As she sings on, a beautiful girl comes out of the calabash. She sits by the maid and prepares food for her, after which, she goes back to the calabash. It becomes a regular routine and the Oba's servants get to know. They report the case to the Oba, who commissions some of his brave servants to arrest her any time she comes out of the calabash again. Eventually, she comes out again and the Oba's warriors make every effort to break the calabash. The Calabash-Girl, after having pity on them, commands the calabash to be broken. She therefore stresses that she must not set her eyes on any piece of the broken calabash. When she comes out, the whole community stands still in admiration of her beauty. This engenders the jealousy of the first wife. The co-wife offers the servants drinks to get drunk, and lures them to show her where the broken calabash is buried. Since they are drunk, they unconsciously give her the description. She brings a piece of the calabash and places it at a strategic place for her mate to see it. The moment the Calabash-Girl sights it, she turns to calabash and jumps to the shrine of the medicine man that prepared the concoction. On knowing the evil of the first wife, the king beheads her.

Here again, we are exposed to indices of intra-gender conflict. The first wife's resentment is shown when the Calabash metamorphoses into a human form. She is comfortable with the fact that it is a calabash, but enraged at the fact that it has turned to a beautiful woman who now takes the attention of her husband. This is an evil of the highest order. The moment the co-wife turns to a Calabash, the first wife asserts her satisfaction: "you stupid calabash that I know is now the talk of the town as a beautiful queen. You will go back to where you belong. You are a calabash". This affirmation reveals her mischief towards her mate. If she has a conscience, she would celebrate with her co-wife after assuming a human form. The highly emotive song rendered by the Calabash-Girl is enough to earn the pity of even the most callous. She laments the fact that her mother's disobedience to the instruction of the native doctor is what has caused her such pains and humiliation by appearing in a disparaging form of a calabash. The following lines are aromatic of such a despondent tone:

Ohwona me ruvwe	She deliberately caused me pains
Ememe Rume-o	I Rume
Inene meruvwe	mother deliberately caused me pain
Ememe Rume ojarume	I Rume, it's a great pain caused me

Instead of the co-wife to be happy over the transformation of her long suffered mate into a human form, she plays the devil part. Her irritation is borne out of her extreme jealousy that her mate is highly adored by her husband, and is taking his attention. This is a prevalent happening in our contemporary society— it is a common knowledge that some women are unjust to their fellow women, but they brazenly cry over gender prejudice. The two folktales discussed above undoubtedly bear elements of intra-gender persecution.

Furthermore, in the tale, “The Precious Bead”, we also notice echoes of intra-gender skirmishes. “The Precious Bead” centers on a polygamist whose two wives give birth to a girl child each. As a wealthy man, when the daughter of the first wife gets to marriageable age, he decorates her hair with a precious bead before she is escorted to her husband’s house. The following morning while pounding yam in the husband’s house, the bead gets loose from her hair and it falls inside the mortar; and unknowingly, she pounds it. She weeps home in sing-song to narrate the issue to her parents. The father, therefore, subjects her to a test— he asks his servant to dig a pit, and it is demarcated into two halves—one half is stuffed with money and jewelry; and the other half with different kinds of poisonous snakes including boas. A narrow bridge is made across the big pit. If the girl deliberately breaks the bead, she is to fall on the side of snakes and they will consume her and her mother; if not, she will fall on the side of money and jewelry and they will be hers and her mothers’. The mother therefore sits by the side of the pit, awaiting the verdict. Eventually, she falls on the side of wealth. Her mother, out of goodwill, load a basin of money and jewelry and offers to her co-wife, but she rebuffs the offer saying that her daughter too would get married, and she will fall on the side of wealth. But in the daughter’s case, she breaks the bead deliberately; and during the test, she falls on the side of boas which swallow her and the mother.

Here again, we perceive intra-gender scuffle. To the first wife, we notice the temper of cruelty manifested by her co-wife towards her. As a good mate, she tends to extend her joy to her co-wife by offering her two basins of money and jewelry. However, since she (her co-wife) has been eaten up by jealousy, she rebuffs her offer bluntly, saying: “Get away with your nonsense gifts. My daughter too will get married and she too will fall on the side of money and jewelry. To hell with your gifts!”. Out of good will, the mate adds one more basin replete with money, but she rejects her offer amidst intense exasperation. What is the crime of the first wife? Why does her mate have to hate her this much?

These are some questions that confront us as we experience the co-wife's hostility towards the first wife. The story does not identify any crime committed by the first wife. It is the fortune made by the daughter of the first wife that earns the revulsion of the co-wife. The exhibition of her goodwill turns against her, as she is confronted by the co-wife's antagonism. It is also wise to note here that the first wife deserves much respect in the home as the first to arrive, but this is not the case. Though the first wife calmly handles the issue so as not to result in extreme conflict, the ill-action of the co-wife is gender sensitive— it is a war waged against same gender, against self! If the first wife is not comfortable with the practice of polygamy, she would not have ventured into it, knowing that the would-be husband is already settled with a wife. Secondly, if she is dissatisfied with the practice of polygamy, she knows where to direct her tirade— the husband, not on the innocent right winged woman she meets in the house.

Furthermore, there are also instances of inter-gender tyranny and bullying in Urhobo folktales. In "The Precious Bead", there are echoes of inter-gender oppression. The song rendered by the daughter of the first wife after breaking the bead, carries a weight of meanings that undoubtedly highlight inter-gender injustice. The song reveals that the joy of womanhood is in procreation; and that a woman who goes to the husband's house and does not have an issue for the man will be reproached, whether it is her fault or not. She sings:

Ibaba ibaba ibaba-o	Father! Father! Father-o!
Ee ibaba ibaba ibaba-o	eh! Father! Father! Father o
Ee ibaba	eh Father!
Ubir'uvie r'ibaba	a seed of bead that father
Gba hovwe kp'orowwen	decorated me with for my marriage
Ubir'uvie berikufia	the bead has broken
Onoja	this is agony!
Orowwen r'ejomọ evwie	marriage without a child
Eeh!	Ah!

Here, the lady is not treated better than a slave. Though the act of breaking the bead is not deliberate, she laments as if it is premeditated. Her lament over her childlessness underscores the way women are subjected to a position of inferiority as mothers and nurses. On the road, people acknowledge the tyrannical nature of her father. Some would say, "such a callous father you have". All the women in the tale are presented as helpless. They merely lament with the lady, and they never fail to remind her of her father's nature as an extremely strident and callous person. Even when she meets her mother, the mother merely withdraws herself and says: "Ah! Your father is very harsh o. go and meet him; and make sure you tell him the truth". The women are created as voiceless and fragile in the tale.

Another aspect of “The Precious Bead” that unfolds instances of inter-gender oppression, is the magnitude of the decision taken by the man over the broken bead—a decision of life and death. He mandates his servants to dig a big pit, demarcated into two halves— one half is loaded with money and jewelry; and the other is sated with all forms of poisonous creatures and boas of varying sizes. A thin bridge is erected across the pit and she is to walk through it to the other side. If she breaks the bead intentionally, she will fall on the side of snakes which will consume her and her mother; and if otherwise, she will fall on the side of money and jewelry and they will be hers and her mothers’. Why should a mere broken bead be quantified with the life of a human being? Can the same be done for a male child? What is the crime of the mother on this? These are sensitive questions that are meant to interrogate inter-gender injustice. Here, we notice a patriarchal temper that places women as less human. This hostility is apparently manifested in our contemporary society. We are confronted by series of biased treatments— while an adulterous woman is severely punished, the man that did the act with her receives little or no punishment. As we learnt in the tale, though the daughter of the first wife, owing to her innocence, survives this obnoxious decree, this is not the case for the daughter of the jealous and greedy co-wife. She is consumed together with her mother. The actions of the ladies are too trivial to warrant such inhuman decree by their father.

Polygamy is another element of inter-gender oppression that is portrayed in the tales under study. As it is observed in the tales, polygamy gives less value to the women. It is a selfish patriarchal practice that debases the women folk. It is wise to argue that in “The Precious Bead”, the man’s harsh decision is borne out of his egotistic recognition that he has two wives; and if one of them dies, he will make use with the one alive, or even marry another. If not, what will make a man to take that kind of decision that will take his only wife away? Similarly, polygamy causes a lot of scuffle in the tales. In “The Calabash-Girl”, the hatred of the first wife towards her co-wife is as a result of the practice of polygamy. Also, in “The Precious Bead”, we also notice the co-wife’s aggressive action towards her mate. All these are borne out of the women’s dissatisfaction to the practice of polygamy. As it is observed in the tales, polygamy draws the man closer to one wife; and farther from the other. It is pertinent to note that polygamy is an instrument used by man to render the woman inferior.

Conclusion

The preceding discussion reveals the availability depiction of inter-gender and intra-gender oppression in three Urhobo folktales, namely, “Okpakemete and Omotekoro”, “*Omote Okpa Na*” (“The Calabash-Girl”) and “*Ovwarha Oghanre Na*” (“The Precious Bead”). The paper demonstrates that gender oppression on the woman is not a monopoly of the man — women also contribute

to the sufferings of their fellow women. Attempt is made in this paper to illustrate these with the three tales examined above on these topicalities.

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