



## **WITCHCRAFT VIOLENCE AND GENDER POLITICS IN THE IGBO COSMOS, A PATRIARCHAL READING OF OSIFO'S *DIZZY ANGEL***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Witchcraft violence is oftentimes (mis)construed by scholars as the inhuman acts inflicted on (the accused) witches, humans with uncanny powers, because of their nefarious activities to humanity. Many scholars have explored this violence and stigmatisation and aver that witchcraft violence is meted out to the most vulnerable in the society, especially, women and children. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, this violence is meted out to mostly women who are considered as *Amusu*, (female) witches. The paper through the feminist lens interrogates this gender politics in the Igbo cosmos using Osifo's *Dizzy Angel* and avers that witches are not conceived as the vulnerable in the Igbo cosmos and that their violence (witchcraft violence to their victims) is as dangerous and inhuman in the Igbo cosmos as the violence (anti-witchcraft violence) meted out to the (female) witches.

**Keywords:** Witchcraft violence, patriarchy, social construction, witches, and women

### **1.0 Introduction:**

Witchcraft is an aspect of the African belief system where certain persons who are believed to have paranormal powers and are considered as witches. Therefore, witches "display mystical innate power" (Olanipekun 2016, p.19). Most Africans, especially those who "have grown in a traditional environments... will have witnessed magic, divination, witchcraft or other mysterious phenomena" (Nyabwari & Kagema, 2014, p.9). The witnessing makes witchcraft an existential reality in Africa.

These scholars, Nyabwari & Kagema, (2014, pp.9-10) go further to argue that these powers are conceived to be "real, distinct from hypnotism, conjuring tricks, obvious cheating, manipulation of hidden means of communication or the result of psychological conditions." So, to many

Africans, whether traditional or modern, witchcraft is real. The real nature of witchcraft is observed by Geschiere (2008) who avers that in Cameroon and South Africa, judges prosecute witches and accept the testimonies of witch doctors, with some being sentenced to up to ten years imprisonment with fines. Geschiere, (2008) observation concretises the nature of witchcraft in Africa. This is because witches can not only be prosecuted traditionally but also in the modern court of law.

The sentencing means that witchcraft is real to many Africans. However, "it is widely accepted that the activities of witches are evil because they cause suffering, pain, sickness, misfortune and death to their prey with their mystical power" (Olanipekun 2016, p.19). Olanipekun's observation reemphasises the idea that within

the African context, some people with supernatural powers are considered evil because they do not use such powers to the benefit of the society rather such powers are used to inflict pains on others.

Most failures in the society are attributed to the violence perpetrated by the witches. This belief is captured in the words of Abidde (2013):

Nigerians believe in the existence of witches, they also believe in juju and the paranormal. They do not take responsibility for their failures and shortcoming. Plane crashes and automobile accidents are, for the most part, attributed to evil forces. If your car malfunctions, you blame the witch; if you have a heart attack or stroke or other health challenges, you blame your father's second or third wife; if you do poorly in school or if you are denied admission to the school of your choice, you blame the woman down the road. And especially since 1999, if you lose an election, well, who do you blame? The witches, of course!" (Quoted in Judith Bachmann 2014, p.1)

Abidde's observation claims that some Nigerians do not accept the negative realities in their society any longer as they shift responsibilities of every misfortune to witchcraft. The failure and rot in the system is attributed to witchcraft. The shift from witchcraft to one's "father's second or third wife" and later to "the woman down the road" suggest a gender disparity where women are mostly accused of being responsible for the societal failures through witchcraft. Schulte (2009, p.3) argues that men remain "the minority of accused in the various phases of the witch-hunts"

### **Witchcraft and the Igbo Cosmos**

Among the Igbo of Nigeria, the "beliefs about witchcraft generally follow the African patterns already known in social anthropology. The woman is the witch, *Amusu*." (Metuh 1999, p.128) Metuh's position indicates that it is

mostly the woman among the Igbo that is been violated or accused as a witch. Although there exist male witches among the Igbo but Metuh (1999) contends that "Men who practice witchcraft are hard to find, but they do exist and are called *ajalagba*, wizards. *Ajalagba* are by far more powerful and more dangerous than witches, hence the saying: *Amusu ada ebu ajalagba*, 'A witch cannot carry a wizard'. Metuh (1999) underscores that "This has overtones of male chauvinism and is often used by men to remind women who appear to be very forward of their subordinate place in society." Hence, pointing to what Nwoye (2011) identifies as the Igbo patriarchal nature that disinherits a woman of landed property from her father.

The Igbo people as Madukasi and Okoye (2020, p.319) argue conceive that "witchcraft itself is made up of two spiritual powers – the power of metempsychosis and that of destruction." These scholars, Madukasi and Okoye (2020), describe "the power of metempsychosis" in "Igbo tonal language as *eriri*" which "means a method of leaving one's physical body and transforming to other spiritual forms, while the destructive mystical power of attacking / inflicting spiritual injuries to others by eating their souls known as *Obi* in Igbo language." Thus, in eating the *obi*, souls, the spiritual becomes an existential reality in the physical realm. Metuh (1999) underscores that this psychic power to leave her *aru*, body, occurs while she is asleep. A thing she does not need to learn but inherent in her personality.

Although he also argues that "witchcraft can also be acquired by swallowing a chemical substance inducing a psychic state which makes it possible for witches to leave their bodies and attack others spiritually", this person that swallows the chemical substance must be a close relative because, "*Amusu adaghi ebu n'iro*, a witch never attacks an outsider" Metuh (1999, p.130). Angeles (2001, p.75) supports this Metuh's position as she contends "A witch is born, not made," and "It takes a witch to make a witch." Therefore, in the Igbo cosmological configuration, witchcraft power is either inherited or swallowed.

The Igbo believe that the soul a witch eats is that of a close relative with which the witch communicates effectively “*Ndi oma obi ha*” as Metuh (1999) renders it. Metuh (1999) also contends that an *Amusu*, may be forced by their league to contribute their children, close relative, even part of herself, that is, when she fails to find a victim to their “ghoulish feast.” An *Amusu*, from this perspective is evil to the Igbo society. The nature of an *Amusu* corroborates Angeles (2001) notion that “there's no such thing as a good, or white, witch. There's no such thing as a bad, or black, witch.” A witch therefore is a witch within the Igbo cosmos.

Metuh (1999) isolates, *cocoyam*, which he asserts has some malevolent spirits against witches, powerful charms prepared by *Dibia*, Igbo native doctors, that can catch a witch red-handed and some powerful deities that terrorises witches as a means of checkmating the witches' violence within the Igbo cosmos.

### **Witchcraft Violence**

Scholars have argued that violence meted out to suspect witches are alarming and unprecedented, especially to women and children who are categorised as the most vulnerable (Adinkrah & Adhikrahi, 2014; Ashforth, 2015; Bello, 2020; Agazue, 2020, 2021; World Health, (n.d); Samata et al, 2021.). These scholars note that the accused female witches are subjugated to various forms of unprecedented torture. Most of the accused women are “battered with sticks, hands and feet, stripped naked, smeared with hot chilli peppers, chained to logs and etcetera, so as to force them to confess of their evil deeds.” (Adinkrah & Adhikrahi 2014, p.316). Others face “torture, starvation, abandonment, and death.” (Ashforth 2015, p.6), those who survive this inhuman behaviour as they, Adinkrah & Adhikrahi (2014, p.316) argue, live “with the psychological trauma of their ordeals for life while most of the victims die in the process.” This violence against female witches they contend is a violation of their right. The UN handbook *for legislation on Violence against women* points out that this kind abuse is a

“violation of women's human rights and a form of gender-based discrimination.” (13)

However, most Africans as Ashforth, (2015), argues worry mostly about “a very different issue of justice, one that goes beyond the simple problem of false accusation and involves harm done by witches to their victims”. He goes further to contend:

Perpetrators of witchcraft, from this perspective, are dangerous and powerful figures, not members of vulnerable groups, however frail seeming they may be. Witches are said to cause illness, death, suffering, and misfortunes of all kinds. They are, in essence, perpetrators of criminal violence, albeit of a particular kind. For people who live in a world with witches, the dangers they pose are real and present. In such places the primary concern is security: how to protect against witchcraft and other forms of violence. A secondary issue is justice: what to do about perpetrators of harm when injury has been done. For people who live with the fear of witchcraft, the issue of justice in relation to witches is clear. Innocent people are being attacked, harmed, and killed. The question, then, is: how can the perpetrators best be identified, disarmed, and, if necessary, punished? (p.7)

Ashforth, (2015) claims that it will be difficult to get justice for the community that sees a witch's nefarious activities as an existential threat to their wellbeing than that of the accused witch. He poses these questions to substantiate his position:

Can the rights of accused witches be protected while justice is done, and seen to be done, for their victims? That is, can there be justice for both accused witches and fearful communities in the era of human rights? Or, to put it in a slightly different form: Is it possible to protect the rights of an accused witch while still securing justice for a community that sees itself at risk of

occult assault? A reading of the recent literature on the subject of “witchcraft violence” and human rights would suggest that the answer to these questions is a resounding *No*. From this perspective, the crimes of witches are imaginary, so the question of justice for their victims is moot (p.7)

For the fact that the advocates of “witchcraft violence” that is, violence meted out to the accused witches, do not feel the existential threat a witch portends to the community, that there acts are understood as a kind of “criminal violence” to the existential peaceful coexistence of the victim’s community, they, the advocates of “witchcraft violence” are unlikely to bring justice both for the “accused witches and the fearful communities”.

To the fearful communities, where witchcraft is practice despite the fact that it is being practice in secrecy, the witchcraft violence is real. According to Ashforth (2015, p.7) the “people living in a world with witches, however, there is no essential ontological difference between the violence perpetrated by witches and the ordinary forms of violence perpetrated by physical means.” He therefore disambiguates “witchcraft violence,” “witchcraft abuse,” or “witchcraft-based violence,” to violence perpetrated by the witches, violence against accused witches he terms “anti-witchcraft violence” while what the various scholars (mis)construe as witchcraft violence he contends to be “anti-anti witchcraft violence” this paper will interrogate witchcraft violence from Ashforth (2015) perspective using Gracy Osifo’s *Dizzy Angel* as it captures these social realities which reemphasises the fact that African literature does not exist in a vacuum, it rather refracts or reflects the existential realities in the society.

### **Feminism**

Feminists’ literary criticism reflects the women struggles over the years to better their lots in the male dominated society. The first wave of this struggle is referred to as liberal feminism, started at about 1890 and lasted to 1920. Women

at this time fight for their basic civil rights like equal opportunities, and the legal right to vote within the US and Great Britain. The second wave which is referred mostly Women’s Liberation Movement focuses attention on the disparity between the male and the female, gender discrimination and its origin and its operational ideology in culture and the society. According to Guo (2009, p.454) some the critical terms in feminism include “the patriarchy, the other and the second sex”. From the feminist point of view, Patriarchy perceives men to be the central authority that controls every human endeavour. On “the other”, feminist like De Beauvoir (1949) and Millet (1978) argue that man is regarded as the human while the woman becomes “the other” of man. In “the second sex”, De Beauvoir (1949) argues that man bothers not to define himself because he sees himself as the representative of humanity but a woman becomes the second sex to a man. In this paper, we will argue from the patriarchal perspective of feminist literary criticism hence an elaborate discourse on it in this paper.

### **Patriarchy and the Subordination of Women**

Patriarchy is “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Sylvia Walby 1990, p.20). Sylvia’s position affirms that men create the social constructs and structures that ‘dominate, oppress and exploit women’. Therefore, patriarchy is an attempt by men to dominate women through certain constructs and structures that are in the interest of men. Men utilise this dominant tool to exercise leverages on women thus making them subservient in the society. Despite the argument of Judith Thurman in the introduction to Simone de Beauvoir’s, *The Second Sex* that “some sexual differences (besides the obvious ones) are innate rather than “situational.” (2010, p.14) .

The assertion by Simone de Beauvoir that “One is not born a woman, one becomes one” (2010, p.14) cannot totally be ruled out because the society has a way of gendering sex to somewhat construct it desires. Chinweizu (1990, p.15)

agrees with the idea of gendering sex as he posits "whoever trains a child in its first years shapes it for life." Therefore, the society can construct a belief system and over a period of time, such beliefs will be accepted as a social reality and also a cultural norm of that given society. This is why Judith Butler (1999, p. xiii) argues that "gender should be overthrown, eliminated, or rendered fatally ambiguous precisely because it is always a sign of subordination for women."

Walby (1990) goes further to identify six basic structures of patriarchy and women subordination in the society. These structures include: "household" where "the woman receives her maintenance in exchange for her labour, especially when she is not also engaged in waged labour" (p.21). She describes housewives in this first structure as the "producing class while husbands are the expropriating class." (p.21). Therefore, husbands in this structure command and dominate the household with little or no interference from the wives. The second structure she identifies as "the economic level" where "waged labour exclude women from the better forms of work and segregate them into worse jobs which are deemed to be less skilled" (p.21).

Hence, men at the economic level, dominate, exploit and oppress women through paid job in order to put women at the subservient level. The "systematic bias" of the state "towards patriarchal interest in its policies and actions" (p.21), she categorises as the third structure. While male violence which in a way "being condoned and legitimated by the state's refusal to intervene against it except on exceptional instances" (p.21) is categorised as the fourth structure. On sexuality, the fifth structure, she argues that "compulsory heterosexuality and sexual double standard" are the markers. Lastly, she identifies cultural institutions "such as the religions, educations and the media" (p.21) as being a structure that enhanced patriarchy. These six structures are in the men's interest and they serve a tool to subordinate women in the society.

Madiba&Ngwenya (2017) compress these structures especially, the sexuality, violence and culture and aver that "cultural practices, beliefs, and traditional laws' (p.56) subordinate women in a patriarchal environment. They identify the payment of bride price in Africa as a tool of sexual violence which increases the chances of women subordination and women's chances of contracting HIV. Thus, cultural constructs permeate women subordination in a patriarchal society. However, other scholars like Hilaire Barnett (2005) argue that patriarchy is a complex concept because so many groups see it from different perspectives. She goes further to contend:

Patriarchy represents one of the most conceptually and analytically complex theoretical constructs and lies at the heart of traditional jurisprudence and the feminist critique. Not only is the concept difficult, but there exist also differing contemporary interpretations of it. Thus liberal feminists, cultural feminists, radical feminists, Marxist-socialist feminists, black feminists, lesbian feminists all have perceptions regarding patriarchy which while often overlapping, by no means converge into a coherent agreed definition. Thus the paradox exists: patriarchy represents a core concept within feminist analyses of society and law, yet the content and meaning of that core concept remain contentious (pp.57-58).

Barnett conceptualises patriarchy as being complex in perspectives and interpretation. For instance, a Marxist-socialist feminist will perceive patriarchy from the economic dialectics of the oppressed and the oppressor where men will be pictured as the oppressor and exploiter of women while a cultural feminist will argue that human culture is absolutely patriarchal. These are complexities that shore up the conceptualisation and signification of patriarchy.

Dogo, (2014) in her interrogation avers that patriarchy

strengthens the “masculine feminine dichotomy” by favouring and perpetuating male domination; and as such, in all areas of society, structures are manipulated to maintain and foster this domination of women by men. In such a system, men are regarded as the authority within the areas of society like the traditional family, clan or tribe. Powers and possessions are passed on from father to son and decent is reckoned in the male line (pp.263-264).

Dogo's observation maintains that patriarchy ensures the rule of men over women by creating “masculine feminine dichotomy” which perpetuates the dominance of men over women. Therefore, patriarchy ensures that women are in subordination to men in every sphere of life and in order to maintain such balance of power, men through the societal structures perpetuate such dominance through patrilineal transfer of ‘power and possession.’ Thus, in most patriarchal societies, women are denied of inheritance paternally. They, men, subjugate women and make them subservient in the society. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, transfer of possession has always been patrilineal until recently when the Supreme Court of Nigeria ruled against it. According to Okoli et al (2020), women like men from that ruling also have the right of patrilineal inheritance. This age old belief of disinheriting women of patrilineal properties is also reflected in Osifo's *Dizzy Angel*.

### **Witchcraft Violence and Gender Politics in Osifo's *Dizzy Angel***

*Dizzy Angel* tells a story of an *Ogbanje* young girl named Ogbanje Dolise Agu. Like the *Ogbanje* myth, *Ogbanje* has the capacity to die and reincarnate over and over again to torment her parents. The determination of her parents to keep her makes them to consult the oracle through Tatakori, the oraculist, who divines that the only way to keep the child alive is to marry her off to an Olokun priest as soon she matures. The neglect to Tatakori's divination leads to the conflict in the novel. Whenever *Ogbanje* faints,

her parents are reminded of her born to die essence which can be saved by marrying her off to an Olokun priest.

In one of her fainting sessions, a sympathiser quizzes: “yes... why won't she say she is lost? How can one woman be cursed with these wicked children that won't stay? Why? She is lost, really lost, and I pity her!” (Osifo, p.3) the response from Nneboy, another sympathiser thus: “That woman again.... She wants to see every woman's child dead.” (Osifo, p.3) designates the sympathiser as evil. Before the woman could say anything, another sympathiser suggested. “How can we tell that she didn't eat up all her prospective children at Ubom, the witches' conference hall, during the nights?” (Osifo, p.3) The witch being referred to as one that has eaten up her children in the witches' conference hall is Atiti, Kokwundu's daughter. Kokwundu the father of Atiti is described as:

... the man who held Bebiri's neighbouring village, Aninta, to ransom with his powers as a witch doctor. Aninta had fought and matched some sons of Bebiri in a struggle to retain the ownership of some farmland. When Kokwundu stepped into the matter, all Aninta sons who had farms in the disputed area ran for their lives although no one was chasing them. As they ran, they barked like wounded dogs. Ever since, no Aninta man, or woman for that matter, ever so much as dared to go rabbit or snail hunting anywhere near the area. Kokwundu had then been acclaimed as the most powerful of all the witch doctors that Bebiri could boast of. Kokwundu died at a ripe old age, leaving many children and grandchildren behind. His first son, Uloji, inherited a lot of his father's powers, but the child for whom he left the more startling powers seemed to have been his youngest daughter, Atiti (Osifo, p.17).

The description of Kokwundu, the great witch doctor and the father of Atiti, is stereotypically positive. His paranormal powers are utilitarian to the Bebiri people. He is the healer and savior of Bebiri in times of calamity and defeat. Some of his "more startling powers" are bequeathed to Atiti. However, the same mystical power is stated as the reason behind Atiti's inability to have children. Nneboy and other Bebiri women describe Atiti as "*agan*", a barren woman (Osifo, pp.3, 4 and 17). Atiti is accused of eating up her children at the "Ubom", the witches' conference. The accusation corresponds with Metuh (1999) observation that in the Igbo cosmos, witches can contribute their children for their "ghoulish feast." Atiti is accused of doing same with her children at the "witches" conference, *Ubom*. However, Kokwundu, his father "died at a ripe old age, leaving many children and grandchildren behind" (Osifo, p.17). The fact that Kokwundu died at this ripe old age is paradoxical to the accusation levelled against his daughter by Nneboy and other women at Ogbanje's house. This accusation stems from the Bebiri societal construction which is in the interest of men. Consequently, any woman with any kind of mysterious power in Bebiri is likely to be seen as evil. Even if such powers are not used to hurt others.

For the fear of being considered evil, Ogbanje's uncanny powers are to be kept as a secret. She was once accused of being a witch at a tender age four when she

told a woman whose daughter was ill, that the girl would die. Three days later, the woman came weeping to Dolise to tell him that his daughter, Ogbanje, was one of those witches who ate up her daughter. Otherwise, how did she know that the girl would die? (Osifo, p.15)

The woman came weeping to Dolise because she considers the supposed act of Ogbanje as an act of violence, which Ashforth, (2015) identifies as "witchcraft violence" that is a violence perpetrated by witches. Ogbanje from the woman's perspective "was one of those witches

who ate up her daughter" probably at their *Ubom*. She substantiates her claims with the poser, "how did she know that the girl would die?" Dolise and Obiageli did everything within their powers to prove Ogbanje's innocence. Even Ogbanje herself knows that she has "extraordinary powers – a thing her father had warned her to tell no one else." (Osifo, p.55) in her words, "... sometime – very rarely, though, I see and know things I shouldn't see and know – that's all" (Osifo p.129). Ogbanje once more manifests her mysterious powers at the Obi's palace on Eke day, "a day of rest for everybody" (Osifo, p.13) where Bebiri people gathered for a witch hunt. The accused witches are "five haggard looking women. Two looked insane with eyes as wild as fire; two others looked terribly frightened, while one looked unruffled." (Osifo, p.14) These women, "Nwole, Nwoji, Monica, and Iweka... (who are) led by Atiti" (Osifo, p.18) are accused of "taken the lives of some illustrious sons" (Osifo, p.16). Atiti, among the five, is accused specifically for the killing "Nwokoro, the first son of Igboje," the husband of Atiti (Osifo, p.16). At the Obi's palace, Ogbanje asks his father, "'Baba, are those five women over their witches? ...We don't know yet... that is why we are here – to find out.'" (Osifo, p.14) Ogbanje waits for a while and touches his father, "'Baba... I know who the witches are... Shut your mouth, you rat! How do you know who the witches are, are you a witch yourself? No... but I feel there are three witches over there'" (Osifo, p.14). Dolise despite knowing the extraordinary powers of his daughter hushes her to keep quiet because he knows that if the Bebiri people get to know about this mystical power of hers, they "would say that her mother, Obiageli, gave her the witchcraft to eat"(Osifo, p.15).

Dolise's assertion corroborates Angeles (2001) argument that "It takes a witch to make a witch." Therefore, Ogbanje could not have been a witch if not that her mother has given her "the witchcraft to eat". Hence, if the Bebiri discover that Ogbanje has paranormal power to the point of knowing whom a witch is, she will be categorised as one. This categorisation is revealed when her father questions her: "'How do you know who the witches are, are you a

witch yourself?’”(Osifo, p.14) Dolise's assertion reveals the societal patriarchal construction. Despite the fact that he loves his daughter and gives her the privileges of accompanying him to the Obi's palace for the witch hunting ceremony, Dolise knows the stigma that is attached to any woman with such a mystical power that his daughter has. Moreover, he does not wish that kind of stigma to be attached to his beloved daughter, Ogbanje, and in an extension to his wife.

The hooting of the owl is sign of an imminent “witchcraft violence” in Bebiri town. Obiageli, the mother of Ogbanje and her household share this common belief. As Obiageli goes out that same night Ogbanje fainted to ease herself, she shivers as she hears “an owl hooting somewhere near their house” (Osifo, p.8). Obiageli confesses: “so early in the night... these witches won't even let their supper digest before they fly off!” (Osifo, p.8) when she gets back to the bed, she silently prays that “the owls would never fly past her roof” (Osifo, p.9). Even when Ekele, the half-brother of Ogbanje optimistically tells his father that same night, “By God's grace, none of us shall die again until we are old” (Osifo, p.10), as if in nullification to his prayers, “an owl hooted in the distance” (Osifo, 10). The anxiety of Obiageli and her household seems to come from the fear of Atiti, the *agan* witch, who lives “six huts away from Dolise's (the father of Ogbanje) house” (Osifo, p.17) because she has “eaten up” her children. She may be happy seeing other women suffer her fate. Therefore, the hooting of the owl becomes significant and suggests that woman six huts away from their house may be getting ready to use her mystical power to perpetrate violence on them.

To ascertain those who perpetrate witchcraft violence in Bebiri town, “Ijeh and Onwuka” (Osifo, p.18) famous witch hunters who have been in the business since their childhood as they inherited their powers from their father are chosen to ascertain the culprit among the accused witches. They are the traditional “anti-witchcraft” specialist. If Ijeh and Onwuka were to be women, Bebiri would have questioned

their inherited powers the same way Atiti is being questioned. The accused are placed “in the centre of the gathering” (Osifo, p.16) where they are “asked to dance” (Osifo, p.19) before leaking the *nzu* which is regarded as

a potent concoction. Only those who made it knew its exact components. It was said to be nothing but ground white native chalk mixed with an unknown medicinal liquid. The mixture had the power of making a witch confess all her evil deed. The mixture ‘caught’ only witches, innocent people were not usually caught (Osifo, p.19)

To Dolise,  
the drinking of *Nzu* was not the correct way of determining who and who was a witch. He didn't know what exactly was in the bowl but somehow, he felt that some trick could be played on an enemy any time. He wasn't sure of his own thoughts – what other way of eliminating witches could he offer the community? He couldn't think of any. He only hoped that none of his wives or children would ever be subjected to the *Nzu*. He didn't trust its judgement. (Osifo, p.20)

The sentiments of Dolise to the witch hunting methodology might be the reason why he hushed his daughter to keep quiet when she whispers to him that there are three witches out of the five accused women.

As they drink the *nzu* concoction, Monica, one of the accused confesses: “I was one of them – O, I was one of them! ... I ate his scrotum... It was sweet, sweet meat.” (Osifo, p.21) Iweka, one of the accused, is also caught by the *nzu*. Ogbanje turns to his father ““One more, Baba.”” (Osifo, p.22) Dolise wonders what kind of a daughter that he has. The next should have been Atiti from Ogbanje's calculations but Atiti stands up and says ““May I go?”” (Osifo, p.22) However, Nwoji, one of the accused women who has been foaming and lying on the floor since she has taken the *nzu* sits up, points at Atiti and declares, ““Atiti is our leader.”” (Osifo,



p.23) Atiti pounces on Nwoji and fights her for accusing her as their leader. Atiti shouts:

'You chicken... you featherless chicken! Do you think you can drag me into the mud because you are wallowing there yourself? Do you want to declare that I am a witch even when *Nzu* has not said so?' (Osifo, p.23)

Atiti stands up and walks away to the consternation of everyone. "Atiti is again not caught?" (Osifo, p.22) The *Nzu* has failed to indict her. "She has been washed by her father, Kowundu" (Osifo, p.23) which makes her superior to the *Nzu* another voice from the crowd suggests. This might be the reason why Dolise never trusts the potency and the authenticity of *Nzu*. Everybody knows that Atiti has mysterious power but the judgement of *Nzu* is the final arbitrator in deciphering whom a witch is in *Bebiri*. The *Nzu* justifies Nwole and "no one suspected her of being a witch anymore" (Osifo, p.24). The fate of Mumudia whose children accused of witchcraft violence "because of her evil deeds" and "was tortured to death by Onwuka and Ijeh" (Osifo, p.24) awaits the "three – Monica, Iweka and Nwoji" (Osifo, p.24).

Mumudia is "buried in the thick evil forest, wrapped up in a dirty, tattered mat" (Osifo, p.24). Her children "invited the whole village for a big feast" (Osifo, p.24) to rejoice over her death. Mumudia represents the insecurity and violence that awaits ordinary women in *Bebiri*, especially, at old age. Children could accuse their mother of witchcraft get her tried, torture her and eventually kill her. Instead of mourning the accused mother, they will celebrate, rejoice and make feast for the family stigma has been erased. Since male witches are hard to find among the Igbo as Metuh (1999) argues, Igbo men hardly suffer Mumudia's fate.

Although Atiti inherited the most of his father's powers, the patriarchal *Bebiri* society never sees her as a successor to her father like "Ijeh and Onwuka" (Osifo, p.18) who succeed their father.

Even Uloji makes this patriarchal remark enviously thus, "I wonder why my father left her all his powers and gave me none." (Osifo, p.235) The patrilineal transfer of 'power and possession' as Dogo (2014, pp.263-264) argues above justifies the choice of Uloji to succeed his father as the Olokun Priest against his sister whom his father bequeaths most of his powers. Atiti herself always boast of this power: "I am Atiti, the daughter of impervious rock, Kokwundu the great and mighty! People do not joke with me." (Osifo, p.235) With these powers, she should have supplanted her father, Kokwundu, as the Olokun priest but patriarchy enjoins patrilineal transfer of power and possession and *Bebiri* is never an exception.

The construction of Atiti as a witch reflects the African conception of a witch. According to Olanipekun (2016, p.19), witches activities are widely accepted as evil because "they cause suffering, pain, sickness, misfortune and death to their prey with their mystical power" Atiti never ceases to exist outside this conception. Apart from killing Nwole her stepson, Atiti connives with her brother Uloji to inflict injury to the family of Dolise because their daughter, Ogbanje, refuses to marry Uloji, a man old enough to father her. She inflicts Dolise's family with cough and rashes. The owl gathers in Dolise's house "as early as seven o'clock in the evening" to hoot (Osifo, p.252).

The gathering owl in *Bebiri* suggests the presence and convening of witches. Ogbanje on the other side suffers pain from Atiti too. She becomes delirious and hallucinates about herself boiling in a fire. She screams "Reduce the fire, reduce the fire!" (Osifo, p.256) other times, she will point at the wall and cry: "Go away! Go away! Go away!" (Osifo, p.257) These negative activities are associated with Atiti who attempts to kill Ogbanje by all means. However, the knocking down of an owl by Dolise using "the butt of his dane gun" (Osifo, p.268) at Ekene's carpenter's shed coincides with Atiti continuous sleeping till "almost ten o'clock in the morning" (Osifo, p.267). Dolise's neighbours kill the owl and throw it inside a burning fire outside the compound.

Nevertheless, “a dog dashed across from the bush and attempted to carry the burning owl away. All the neighbours rushed at the dog with their sticks and soon the dog was burning with the owl.” (Osifo, p.268) that same day “at about six o’clock in the evening, it was discovered that Atiti was dead...barking like a dog” (Osifo, p.269). Bebiri people link her death with the events that took place at Dolise’s house. One of them confesses: ““God my father...I have never seen anything like it. If that is how witches die, then I will never be a witch.””(Osifo, p.269)The confession of the Bebiri people never to be witches is linked to the rise and fall of Atiti, the daughter of Kokwundu and the violence she and her cohorts inflicted on the Bebiri society.

### Conclusion

The paper identifies that witchcraft violence is real and physical. The Bebiri society feel and see it despite the fact that it is only associated with the (female) witches of which Atiti and her partners represent. The anti-witchcraft violence is also real and despicable as the witch hunt depicts. The witch-hunt has only women as the accused while men are the hunters. This refraction is rather a reflection of the patriarchal Bebiri society.

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