

Attending to Igbo Women's Stories in the Cause of Malaria Prevention: Insider/Outsider Perspective

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Abstract

This paper discusses the insider and outsider epistemological dilemma that sideline an African woman while conducting research within her culture. The study was based upon hermeneutic inquiry designed to give voice to the small (household) experiences of rural Igbo women in Nigeria (mothers and health workers), to consider how their viewpoints, perspectives, and imaginings might contribute to the fight for a malaria-free Nigeria.

The theoretical framework used was African womanism to reflect how women live with the reality of the threat of malaria. The issues of privilege few research relationship and the negotiating power and sense of sisterhood. To see if my reflective experience on assumed insider/outsider positions in this research would contribute to the current discourses in qualitative research. It begins with my fieldwork memo and ends with a quote from Precious Oporum. This perspective is to allow the reader to view research as an interpretative element on one side and socio-narratology situated in the world of qualitative research study.

Keywords: Africana womanism matter, Reflexivity, Malaria, Insider/Outsider, Researcher positioning, Pregnant women, Igbo worldview, Narrative inquiry

Introduction

As I walked into the clinic that morning, I was bewildered with the distressing sight of the women waiting to be attended to by the midwives. My heart skipped in fright and I breathed deeply to control my anxiety. I can't even explain why I felt that way, but it was obvious that the women were filled with so much misery for their immediate environment of no electricity, no comfortable sitting place, increase poverty and their pregnancy space. A thought came into my mind right there: "What a world of women, pregnancy today, child birth tomorrow, husband's subjugation and all that". It was only then that it occurred to me that it was all about my assumption. But I am part of this world, why am I different? Has something gone wrong with me? (Anastasia) No, in this world, things need to be understood as they are experienced not as how they appear [1].

This paper is based upon a hermeneutic inquiry designed to give voice to the small (household) experiences of rural Igbo women in Nigeria (mothers and health workers), to consider how their viewpoints, perspectives, and imaginings might contribute to the fight for a malaria-free Nigeria. This attention to "the little happenings in the lives of African women" defines what Emecheta (1988 page 175) and others, see as one among several African notions of feminism, namely Africana Womanism [2]. This perspective embraces struggle at the level of a person's own community as well as the individual self, based on culturally important aspects of difference, such as the centrality of African family values.

As a starting point, Malaria has been reported as pregnant women's worst enemy, with maternal mortality estimated as 800 per 100,000 live births and a ratio of one in 8 pregnant women dying from malaria [3]. As part of the global initiative to reduce malaria deaths before 2015 the Nigerian government introduced intervention programmes to protect pregnant women, and children under-five years of age [4]. Such intervention includes the use of intermittent preventative treatment with anti-malarial medications, and distribution of insecticide-treated nets (ITNs). However, although there has been considerable and effective intervention in controlling this preventable disease in the African continent, marked inconsistency in the distribution of the ITN, scarcity and low

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usage in Nigeria are apparent, despite emphasis on community-based strategies for malaria control [3]. The 'big (pan-African/national) story' of malaria has found many voices, speaking from a predominantly positivist perspective. While some more interpretivist approaches to exploring experience have been employed elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa, there remains a need for more participatory research related to health care issues in Nigeria [5].

The reflective note above reflected my emerging new identity, assumed outsider position, which suddenly shifted my thinking. Maybe I had such thoughts going on because of my childhood experience of what it takes to be a woman, and my presumptions of the meaning structure that has positioned women under subjugation within their environment. And perhaps the new world I have come to know may be in a different way is also constructed on a patriarchal order. My limited understanding of this world has thrown me into the clearing of seeking. In some ways, given the entanglement of culture and my outsidership, I tried to situate myself in the being of the world of these women; as a mother, sister, daughter and a health professional working within the environment. Although I share the same identity with these women but my new multiple identities considerably created a vacuum of suspense between us. In the selection process, I wanted to be as inclusive as I could, I never picked the participants on my own they rather indicated interest to contribute their experiences. Because many women and health workers were enthusiastic of being part of the research while anticipating seeing the outcome, it was also important that what I took back to the participants on follow-up visits showed that I had been listening to them all and not an apparently privileged few.

The study centered on three senatorial zone of Enugu State in Eastern Nigeria - Nsukka, Udi (Ngwo) and Enugu South (Amechi). Twenty pregnant women and mothers and 19 health workers participated a first round of interviews and focus group discussion occurred over 16 days in March-April 2014, followed by a first phase of interpretation. This paper draws on a follow-up field trip in January 2015, during which some of the participants gathered together to discuss thoughts generated from their conversations the previous year, this constituted a second phase of interpretation, in which two stories told by the women took over the work of analysis as actors in the research. The stories echo the conflicting sentiments of poet Precious Oporum's opening words thus: *"The vehicle is not recognized // I'm the pillar who should be recognized // A camouflage equity // A visible egocentricity."*

What is a story?

Many writers have offered explanations of what a story is, but generally speaking,

Stories...like the lives they tell about, are always open-ended, inconclusive, and ambiguous...Some are big; others are little [7, page5].

When such stories are analysed or interpreted in some way they become narratives. Verbally, big stories such as life histories and autobiographies are usually told in interview contexts [9]. Small stories mostly occur during ordinary conversation and are about every day, very localized or mundane events. Georgakopoulou

(2006) describes small stories as "narratives-in-interaction" [7], suggests three criteria of narrative: event sequencing, world-disruption, and position of the narrated events. However, [8] suggests *world-making* as a better alternative to world-disruption in some contexts. Typically, narrative analysis approaches stories as a way to make sense of individual lives, or theorize identity by focusing on the narrator of the story and her/his way of retelling the events [9]. Such analysis is often very structured, such as in [10] 'model of natural narrative' based on structural linguistics, which is commonly used, because its sequence of stages seems to create a fully formed structure with a beginning and an end. But [6] suggests that this type of analysis tends to "freeze events and lived experiences into rigid sequences" predetermined by the analyst.

While narrative as a method for understanding, rests on the notion that "one thing happens in consequence of another", [11, page 25] socio-narratology is not so concerned with what stories reveal about the mind of the storyteller but is more interested in seeing the story as a living actor. So, retrospection does not involve attempts to impose some sort of predictive order on events. Rather, it is a dialogical process involving self, the story, and others, in search of connections between what may be disparate events and human doings that appear, in hindsight, to hold together in meaningful (but always contestable) ways. So, socio-narratology uses stories to understand how life becomes social in terms of their location, how seriously they are taken, and how they are exchanged as tokens of membership within communities [11]. Describes the ways stories achieve this in terms of a repertoire of "capacities". He emphasizes that these are not exhaustive, and points out that, (No) threshold number of these capacities marks qualification for being a story. Stories, to be stories, must have a sufficient (original emphasis) number... and sufficiency depends on how the capacities are used, as well as the tolerances of those who receive the story [11, page 28].

Working with the women's stories

When we decide to use stories [11] says we should consider what we want to do with them. The phenomenon of interest in this study was the experience of protecting the family from malaria through the use of insecticide treated net (ITNs). We sought to explore how the women tried to make sense of things in terms of their everyday concerns and goals. This seemed to be consistent with the work of Igbo story-telling and poetry. In former times, such oral performance focused on ethical and moral behavior, and passing on of culture from generation to generation, in traditional African society. Later, the main concern was protecting the core values of African society against western imperialism [12]. Nowadays, the focus has widened to reflect contemporary religious, political, and social issues and conflicts [13]. We wanted to adopt a point of departure for our thinking *about* the larger story of malaria prevention, by using small, tangential stories as tools to think with.

The Story of Nneka's Bed (Pseudonyms are used for participants)

Nneka's story was told in consequence of the following exchange between Anastesia, and a small group of mothers and health workers, during that second field trip. They met to talk about the themes identified from the previous year's discussions,

in which one mother had explained, "... they (distributors) will give some and hide some net...they will hoard the net and later on they will start selling it..." (28 year old mother)

Now, wanting to talk some more about the issue of why mothers and their families were not using ITNs Anastesia asked, "Could you explain why some homes use the net while others are not using it?"

Grace: "Depending on the husband's choice. If husband disapproves it.... that's it. If (this is not accepted) there will be conflict."

Anastesia: "Apart from the net, could someone talk about any issue at home that conflict exists between you and your husband and how you resolved it?"

This led Nneka to tell this story

"Let me tell us this, in the past, there was a bed that we were using. Incidentally, this bed got sagged. Each time I sleep and wake up in the morning, I feel miserable because of aches and pains in my body....my whole body will be paining me. So I presented it to my husband....I said to him, "Don't you think that there is the need to change this bed at least to a firmer one?". He refused and said, "Is this one not bed.....what are we doing with another bed?". After arguing, I tried to continue to convince him that it is for my own good and your own good. He said he feels very OK with it. We kept arguing about it. He later said, "If you have the money....go on and do it." I now went and got a firmer bed with big mattress and we started sleeping on it. So one day I started to have a joke of him and I said, "How are you feeling?" He said, "it is true oh, this bed is OK and I feel better."

Apart from the fact that it has not got a clear 'coda', Nneka's story fits very well into Labov's narrative structure. This 'frozen' structure makes it easy to limit what we pay attention to and what we might say about it. In particular, the story goes to reflect Grace's opinion that in some cases it is the husband who is the barrier to his wife and children benefitting from having an ITN. But the orientation of Nneka's story is spatial in terms of her external physical place (the sagging bed) and her internal bodily sensation (her aches and pains). These two locations are spatially different in that the bed is the 'being-there' of the experience and the aches and pains are the 'being-in' of the experience. If these two things are thought about in combination they can be thought to create a space for the action that follows. In other words, "... space is a practiced place," [9, page 350]. Nneka's core narrative is temporal in terms of the here-and-now of the immediate life-world of her relationship with her husband. But can we see an ambiguity in the narrative? Nneka argues on the basis that the bed will be good for both of them, but her husband has no discomfort and overrules her on that basis. But although it might seem that she is subjugated, in fact she is not completely so because she has her own money and her husband is content for her to use it. Therefore, the situation is resolved to their mutual satisfaction, the point of the story being that family harmony and good humor were not compromised.

In Frank's opinion such a structured approach "puts a monological seal on belief in the story's point rather than qualifying or complicating belief, opening dialogue" [11, page 151]. In contrast, a "dialogical narrative analysis" [11, page 86] does not seek to finalize stories or cut off dialogue.when we

speaking to one another we do not so much as transmit well-defined facts, as place our own aspirations and knowledge into a broader and richer horizon through dialogue with the other [14, page 106].

And in Frank's approach, the 'other' is the story as well as the human storytellers. Because of this we wanted to demonstrate how the story took part in the conversation, by bringing the malaria concern closer to hand through the ensuing dialogue, which it brought about. This would give credibility to the interpretation. [An extended segment of the focus group transcript, which lets the women and the story speak for them if requested, would be sent as an attachment].

Dialogical Narrative Analysis

We now consider Nneka's story in terms of four of Frank's story capacities namely:

1. The capacity to create characters and drama
2. The capacity to offer differing possibilities for action/identity
3. The capacity to reveal moral complexity
4. The capacity to open a portal into other stories

How the story worked to uncover the women's wider meaning-making is shown by linking each capacity to extracts from the discussion that followed directly from Nneka's telling of her story. These are then considered in terms of Afrikan Womanist characteristics and themes. What this tries to demonstrate is that, even if we take the most mundane, everyday events of the immediate life-world as a starting point, "...space is historicized place, transformed by human activity," [9, page 363].

The capacity to create characters and drama

Some change in hope or expectation is usually at the root of the drama in stories. Often this takes the form of a troublesome problem, either mundane everyday (small stories), or of great importance (big stories). The 'problem' is the thread that holds one person's story together, and pulls in the stories of the people who hear it. The troublesome problem (or character) in Nneka's small story is the bed that sagged, but the events unfold from the fact that Nneka is troubled by this and her husband is not. She has pain and discomfort, which she blames on the bed, but he does not, therefore he will not buy a new bed and argument results. We are not sure how the story will end. The ensuing discussion puts Grace's earlier remark about why some families use Insecticide Treated Net (ITN) while others do not into context, in terms of the domestic relationships (alongside wider system-based factors) that shape their decision-making.

"Some of our men are very stubborn.... when you are nagging they will just keep to themselves and say "I am the man of the house, whatever I say stands and you better take your time or else...." (Ifeoma)

"Some will say that I married you and all you have belonged to me. I will tell you what to do with that money and not you to decide." (Mary)

"The woman has to manage the one in the house because you don't have the money to buy and you are the one that is complaining.

No alternative.....it means that the woman will continue to suffer and bear it because the man has already made up his mind.....since she doesn't have the money. That is exactly what will happen in that home." (Chika)

A stereotypical image of the Igbo woman depicts her as preoccupied with the marital ethos of submission and childbearing. Likewise, an average Igbo man as seeing a wife as his property and expecting total submission to gain access to his world of love and support. In some ways this stereotypical view comes through as the women make sense of Nneka's problem. Some men, although not all, are portrayed as self-interested and stubborn, although the women do not see this as characteristic of Igbo men only but of all Nigerian men. Such dominance is presented as a barrier to reasoned argument. At the same time both Mary and Chika talk about husbands' control of money, although again, Mary says "some" not all men. But the outcome of Nneka's story makes the point that even though economic power is an issue, this is not simply based on a patriarchal mindset, because she had the means to take action if she wanted to, because she had the money to do so.

The capacity to offer differing possibilities for action/identity

The drama within stories comes from the ways the characters strive to come to terms with a troublesome problem and find some resolution. In this regard stories offer differing possibilities for action and exploration of different facets of identity [11]. In the performance of her story, Nneka tells how, through persistent argument, she achieves the concession from her husband, "...if you have the money...go on and do it" (Nneka). To the listeners this identifies her as an active agent,

"She was able to sort out this because she is working and has her own money. Telling him before buying it is just a necessary thing to do because he is the man of the house and you have to show some respect." (Chika)

Others did not have monetary power to facilitate action, and the story acts as a resource to offer alternatives ways of doing and being as the women, with some laughter, share their personal strategies.

"Sometimes instead of nagging just use your soft and bedroom voice. I believe that would work out because that has worked out for me. Nagging will not do anything." (Blessing)

"I use petting style to win my fight because my husband is older than me. I can't even raise my voice on him not to talk of fighting.... he will just kill me. Sometimes I will just start crying....he doesn't like seeing me crying. He will just do whatever I asked him anytime he sees me crying." (Ijeoma)

"But hearing other people's strategy is good. That you can add to your own to help you sort out issues. I will use crying and petting because I have never apply that. I always talk and talk and talk before my needs are taken care of. Applying these strategies will reduce the time I spent talking to my husband...sometimes it takes days even weeks before he listens." (Linda)

It might seem as though their conversation is superficial. But it could be interpreted as a lighthearted way to affirm the actuality of marriage as a social institution, which reflects their common horizon of understanding when trying to make sense of

day-to-day experience. So, in this respect it seems that they are pragmatic in the context of the [15] "stringency of the necessary" (page 22) in relation to their position, and the potential for disruption and risk in taking particular actions.

The capacity to open up moral complexity

This shaping of their experiences by the social relationships in which they occur demonstrates the capacity of stories to open up complexity as well as bring clarity [11]. The issues raised in response to Nneka are gendered and to some extent class-based, inviting assumptions in the listener, which need to be interpreted [6].

"Some will say I married you, and all you have belong to me. I will tell you what to do with that money and not you to decide." (Blessing)

The listener is invited to take sides on what we think are acceptable and unacceptable ways to act. But as [11] points out, the process also arouses emotion and imagination about how things might be different. Hence, Nneka had money and, apparently by force of argument, was able to use the money as she wished for a new bed. But Nnenna widens the issue with thoughts about how life in general could be different for everybody, including men.

"I think the problem of inferiority complex is what is worrying us. We are too backward and find it difficult coming out...at times even some men suffer the same." (Nnenna)

From an Afrikana Womanist perspective her comment is interesting in as much as gender-specific issues are not the most salient for Africana women. In the wider context women see themselves as partners with men in a collective struggle against subjugating attitudes [2]. For Igbo women,

Marriages involve not just a couple but rather two kinds of roles and mutual rights and obligations. The goal is to make sure the partners are responsible in order to avoid future marital problems with potentially negative consequences for a large number of people [16].

In leading our thoughts this way Nnenna highlights the fourth capacity of Nneka's story of the bed.

The capacity to open a portal into other stories

Stories within stories told within groups are like Russian dolls that remind us that every experience contains many stories that could be told [6]. Nneka persuades us that her husband's mindset changed once they started sleeping on the new bed.

"So one day I started to have a joke of him and I said, 'How are you feeling?' He said, 'It is true...this bed is OK and I feel better."

But this small victory is set against their talk of what they see as the persistence of male dominance and the need for things to change at societal level.

"I think Nigerian society is fighting against these women caging and maltreatment through a lot of programmes now." (Grace)

"And the only way you can empower them is through education. And if they are learned they can handle some issues without seeking permission from their husbands." (Nneka)

So the portal into the big story of female empowerment in

Nigeria is opened as the women draw on the life stories of notable Igbo women active in the cause at national and international level.

"You see this Nollywood actress by name Patience Ozokwor¹... like the story she told about herself.... she said that our women are so dogmatic; they will sit down in the house gossiping about irrelevant things. Maybe you didn't go to school or seen the four walls of a university.... She said 'What did I read.....but today I am a public figure.'" (Blessing)

"Look at somebody like 'Oby'² (Ezekwesili) advocating for women in the Aso rock." (Ijeoma)

In these self-naming, self-defining examples the women advocate for self-affirmation, and a 'genuine-ness in sisterhood' characteristic of Africana womanism. In so doing they move beyond the "stringency of the necessary" towards the "wealth of the possible" [15, page 22] (Table 1 and Figure 1).

The story of the home-made spice

The Afrikana Womanist themes of sisterhood, positive affirmation of self-worth, and meaningful union with men appear again in a second story told by Nnenna (Figure 2), which centers around the characters of a poor woman, a rich woman and a jar of home-made spice. In this story the poor woman abases herself before the rich woman by giving her a gift, which in Nnenna's opinion, she should not have done, not only because she did not have much of it, but also because she was doing it in hope of future favors from the rich woman. In Nnenna's opinion, the

rich woman relished the power her apparent wealth and position gave her in the eyes of her poorer sister. In setting up these two contrasting identities, the story leads the women to express their envy, despair, aspiration and beliefs in relation to the dichotomies that frame the actuality of their lived experience such as, freedom

Narrative category	Narrative question	Narrative function	Linguistic form
ABSTRACT	What is the story about?	Signals the start of the story	A short summarizing statement
ORIENTATION	Who/what is involved and when/where did it take place?	Helps the listener to situate the story	Past continuous verbs
COMPLICATING ACTION	Then what happened?	The core narrative account of events	Temporally ordered narrative clauses. Simple past/present verbs
RESOLUTION	What finally happened?	Recapitulates the final key event	The last narrative clause of the Complicating Action
EVALUATION	So what?	Makes the point of the story clear	Includes evaluative commentary, repetition, embedded speech
CODA	How does it all end?	Signals the story has ended	Includes evaluative commentary, repetition, embedded speech

Table 1: Labov's Model of Natural Narrative

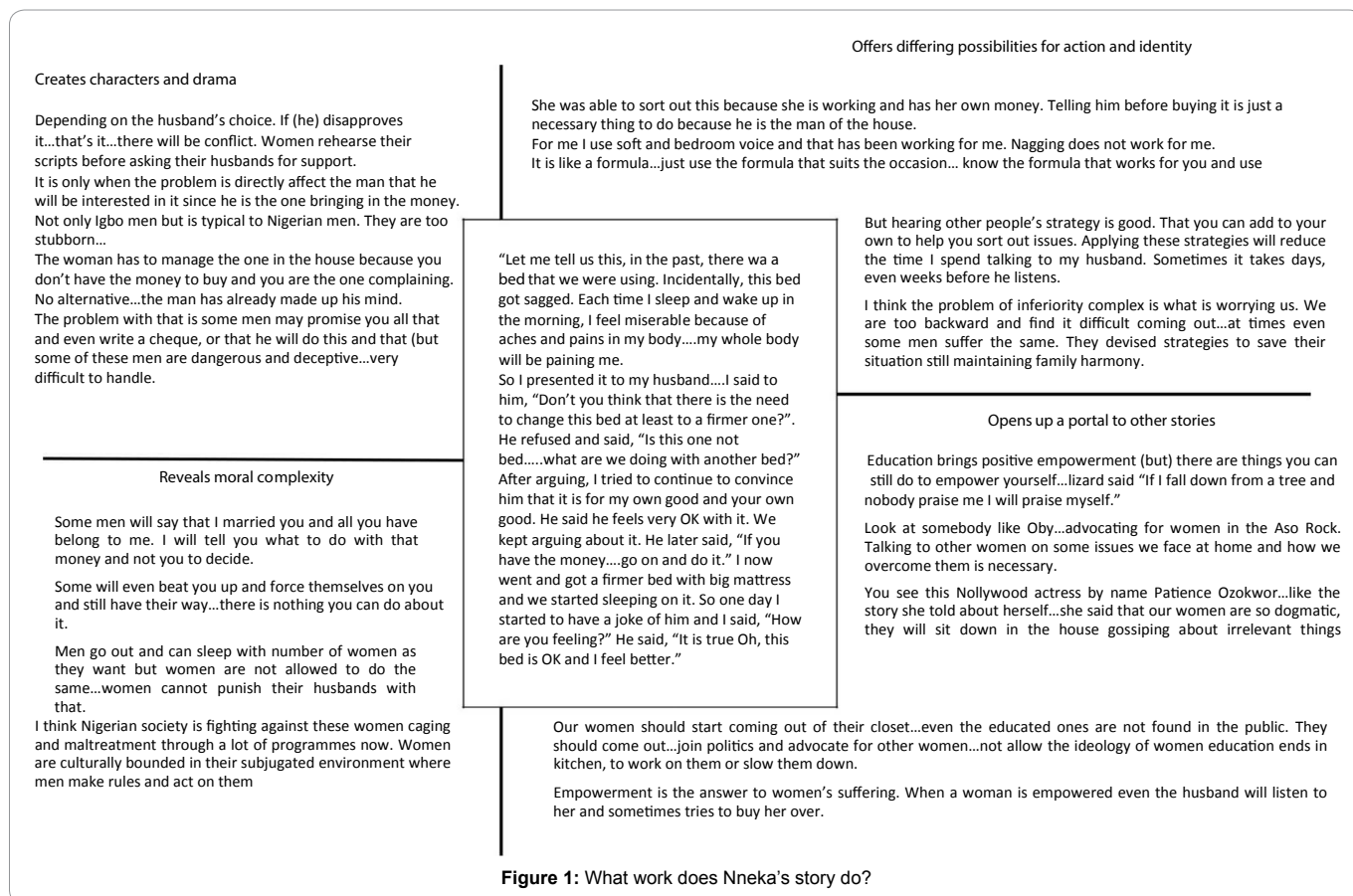


Figure 1: What work does Nneka's story do?

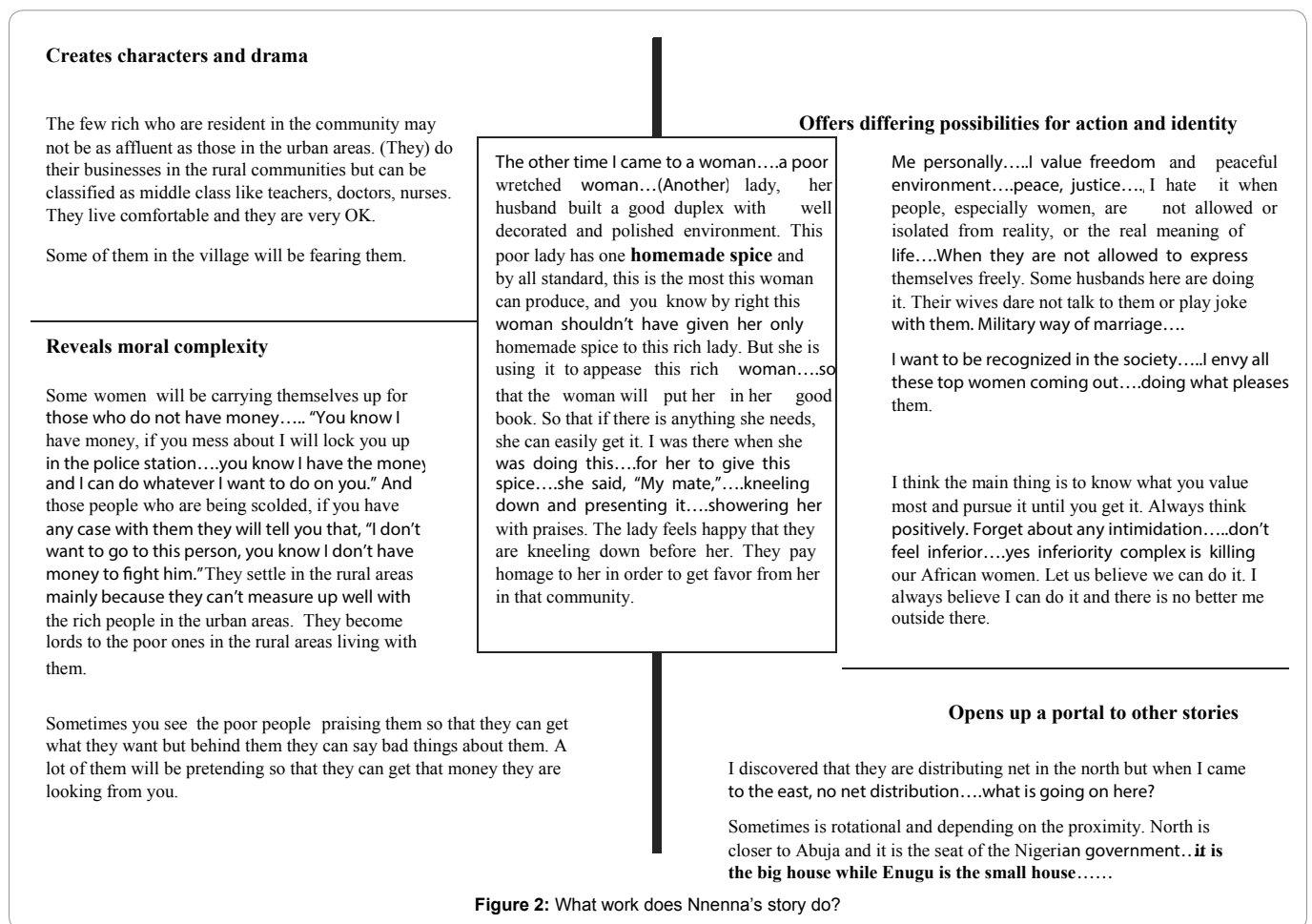


Figure 2: What work does Nnenna's story do?

versus isolation; peace and justice versus "military way of marriage"; respect and recognition versus intimidation. Again, as with Nneka's story, they express their pragmatic hopes for different ways of being in terms of the "wealth of the possible" [15, page 22].

¹**Patience Ozokwor**, aka **Mama G**, is a veteran Nigerian actress, who has been in over 200 movies to date. She was born in Ngwo, Enugu State.

²**Dr. Oby Ezekwesili** is a former vice president of the World Bank. She founded the #BringBackOurGirls Group following the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Girls Secondary School in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria in 2014.

"I want to be recognized in the society....I envy all these top women coming out....doing what pleases them." (Ijeoma)

"Let us believe we can do it. I always believe I can do it and there is no better me outside there." (Grace)

The moral complexity revealed by this story can be understood through the words of Gabriel [27], whose poem entitled *'Once upon a time'* compares the present postcolonial time with the past, as a father tells his young son how he feels that people have lost the innocence and openness of the pre-colonial culture and customs of their homeland.

Once upon a time, son,

they used to laugh with their hearts and laugh with their eyes: but now they only laugh with their teeth, while their ice-block-cold eyes

search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed

they used to shake hands with their hearts: but that's gone, son.

Now they shake hands without hearts while their left hands

search my empty pockets.

Among Okara's Ijo people the left hand is the wrong or abominable hand. It is the hand of forgetfulness, carelessness, insolence, rudeness [17], and the Igbo people share these negative connotations. In his commentary on Okara's poem [16] explains that "the speaker tells us that he has learnt to deal with this hard, insincere world by becoming just like all the other people; he too hides his real emotions and speaks words he clearly does not mean" (page 6).

A critical consideration of postcolonial discourse is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is reasonable to suggest that Nnenna's story reflects a wider discourse of corruption and elitism. The atmosphere of frustration, and the strain between the women's values and beliefs and the unequal distribution of legitimate opportunities within society was evident in their

conversation around the story. The work of this small story in opening the way to the bigger story of malaria was summed up beautifully.

"I discovered that they are distributing net in the north but when I came to the east, no net distribution.... what is going on here?" (Anastesia)

"Sometimes is rotational and depending on the proximity. North is closer to Abuja and it is the seat of the Nigerian government....it is the big house while Enugu is the small house....." (Nneka)

Discussion

These stories for the women created an opportunity for them to talk about different ways of being relating to their families and others. Interestingly, the women stories not only worked on them but also did work on me in terms of my identity. My initial outsider status took me by surprise as I realized how a complete outsider I have become in a culture I thought I was an insider. The sudden shift from my outsider status to a more trusted insider status position revealed itself during my second visit. There was reawakening of thoughtful discussion as the women began to open up to other hidden stories which they were reluctant to talk about. These stories began to animate their beings. The stories allowed them to be told because of the renewed sense of sisterhood and acceptance which apparently exposed the participant's wider range of emotions and participation. The women and I became amused as Nneka told the sagged bed story. The women saw me as part of them and opened up to talk about the sensitive part of their experiences that they never thought before. It was only when they started speaking that their emotional connections began to emerge. They began to broker access to the society and their immediate environment that enveloped and silenced their voices from being heard. The interview question on family conflict shifted the focus on ITN use to family relationship which supposedly influences ITN use. The interview context and individual perspective took the discussion to a broader emotional expression.

Saw the living body as the true subject of experience, which every object turns to "...the body is the pivot of the world" (page 84) [18]. In the Igbo world- view we enter into meaning-making relationship with soul and spirit through our material bodies and also with nature and the elements. In our interpretation of Nneka's story her recollection of the bed and her attempts to relieve her physical discomfort became a metaphor for malaria and women's effort to protect themselves and their families. In the same way the poor woman's kneeling down before the rich woman in hope of favor was a metaphor for the frustration and humiliation of struggling against inequity and elitism in the distribution of ITNs. It seemed that, in a Heideggerian (1962) sense, the two stories were active in 'throwing' us into the meaning-making 'clearing' where, in the course of conversation our horizons of understanding were interwoven and expanded. [11] says the primary work of stories is to act as guides to help people choose what is worth paying attention to, and to think about their selections in an evaluative way. In this respect the folktales of African oral tradition do important work. They voice the teller's views about life drawn from their personal observation of people's behavior in the community. Folktales have a typical formal opening and go on to make some important point through the use of symbols and characters created for the

purpose [19]. The point may be announced at the end of the story or the audience may be left to work it out. Although not folktales as such, Nneka's and Nnenna's stories reflect these characteristics. They start formally, *"Let me tell us this, in the past, there was a bed"*; *"The other time I came to a woman...."* They are observational and each makes use of a powerful symbol – the bed and the jar of spice. They each direct attention to what matters by steering the conversation to important realities of the women's life-world.

Life-world realities highlighted by the stories

It seems that inequity is the common thread in the two stories. In the first story this is linked to gender inequality, in the second story it is linked to elitism. [20] in a study in Eastern Nigeria highlighted male dominance in decision making in the family, and studies in Ghana on gender roles have reported that women who lack financial empowerment or economic support from husbands or male relatives, or who are in disagreements with husbands or family elders in seeking appropriate treatment, will face difficulty in accessing and utilizing malaria prevention interventions [21]. The central culture that permeates the Nigerian society is patriarchal. It persists as the natural order of things that constrains actualization of gender equality and empowerment of women and "is demonstrated both consciously and unconsciously, despite the general drive for a meaningful change in gender relations through policy initiatives and actions" [22, page 63]. So, although all the whole population faces risk, malaria vulnerability and risk status could also be determined by gender [23]. The more women have control of household finance, the more they give priority to the purchase and use of ITNs for their entire household. However, if women depend solely on their husbands, they are less likely to purchase and use ITNs for themselves and their children unless their husbands show interest in their use [24].

As aforementioned, Afrikanan Womanist philosophy argues that given the collective oppression of Afrikanan people globally, women "cannot afford the luxury...of being consumed by gender issues", [2, page 51]. So yes, re-orientation of men's mind set via gender education across socio-economic lines is an important step in enhancing women's empowerment [25-29]. But in the meantime, three of the guiding principles of the Afrikanan Womanists are brought to the fore by the two stories; meaningful and pragmatic accommodation with men, genuineness in sisterhood, and an authentic connection to community [30].

Conclusion

In her consideration of the phenomenology of African female existence Bakare-Yusuf (2003) cautions us to remember that when talking about Afrikanan women, we must understand that this identity is tied to very specific gender configurations, forms of access to and control over social and spiritual life, individual choices and so on, all taking place in particular cultural milieux. It has focused on what a group of Igbo women had to tell about family and social relationships that helped them make meaning of their situated efforts to protect their children and families from malaria attack. It has helped to illuminate experiences that contribute to both empowering and disempowering women in this matter, and we have tried to demonstrate the power and value of 'small stories' and the process of storytelling as an important basis for knowledge generation, and as a resource to

keep malaria on the international health agenda. And so Nneka's bed and the home-made spice become actors on a much larger stage. As witnesses to this, these women's small life-world stories are worthy of celebration, not least by the women themselves. As Nneka said, referring to words of celebrated Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe (2010/1958, page 21);

"Lizard said, 'If I fall down from a tree and nobody praise me, I will praise myself.'"

I see everything I'm the light

Deserve I a Knight

I'm the boulevard of life

Bushy track decorate'd for life

Hear I everything before it happens

I need honour to strengthen

I'm the wise and unwise nature

I'm the maturity amateur

Oh! The vehicle is not recognized The body's meeting

I'm the pillar who should be recognized Is the meeting of unconscious minding

I feed and supply to everyone

Without dereliction to anyone

I'm the food basket Who needs respect

I'm the mirror that attracts Even in narrow tracks

Insensate sentient

The meeting of disparagement

A camouflage equity A visible egocentricity

Then, the meeting of inequity Now the meeting of equity

I'm a room that embodies thy speaker

Used thy to conquer

Precious Oporum (2016)

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