

**Destitution and Dissoluteness: A Deconstructive Reading of Ubesie's *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe*
Ogechukwu F. U. Chukwuneke, Chinedu C. Ezebube & Chioma M. Akaeze**

Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

**Chinedu C. Ezebube – corresponding author

Abstract

This paper aims to demonstrate through a deconstructive reading that although *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* upholds destitution as the factor behind Enyi's crime, it failed to sustain its narrative logic as it also showed dissoluteness as behind his crimes. Pointedly, the objectives of this paper are to show how *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* failed to uphold its narrative logic and demonstrate that criminality is a matter of choice. The study hinges on the theoretical tenets of deconstruction literary theory. *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* is one of the canonical Igbo literary texts. It explores robbery and factors that may lead one into it. It presents Enyi, an orphan who turned to crime as a result of the cruel treatments meted out on him by the duo of fate and society. It argues that it was destitution that led Enyi into crime. Nevertheless, a deconstructive reading proves that in showing how it was destitution and the struggle for survival that led Enyi into crime, the text also demonstrated how it was dissoluteness that is behind Enyi's delinquency therefore, forcing the text to an impasse. Enyi's deviance can then be tied to a joint factor of dissoluteness and destitution and by extension, self-will. It is concluded that even though there are austere conditions that may tempt one into crime, the choice to or not to engage in it lies on one. Thus, criminality whatever the circumstances is deliberate.

Keywords - deviance, destitution, dissoluteness, deconstruction, crime

Introduction

Societies all over the world have their prevalent beliefs which form the threshold for acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. Murfin and Ray (1998) define ideology as a set of beliefs underlying the customs, habits and practices common to a given social group. They further say that to members of a group, they are true, natural and universally acceptable and that it governs perception, judgment and prejudices. Derailing from societal norms or acting in ways contrary to the expectations of a society is referred to as deviance. Haralambos and Holborn (2013) explain that deviance may be serious or unserious. A deviant act is unserious when it does not constitute nuisance to other members of society. Contrariwise, a serious deviance consists in acts that are deemed detrimental to members of society and attracts disapproval and punishment. A serious deviance is referred to as crime.

Ritzer and Stepnisky (2014) avow that crime is an integral part of human life which can never be eradicated but can only be curbed. No one is born a criminal. Some persons turn to crime as a survival measure whilst others engage in

criminal activities for the love of it. Societies experience similar crimes, what they however do not share is their beliefs about various crimes and the attending punishments. Ideology differs from one group to another as such deviance is culturally bound as what is prohibited in one group may be permissible in another. Be it as it may, stealing, in its varying degrees is a crime that is frowned at by societies around the globe.

The Igbo of south eastern Nigeria have their classification of robberies and to each class, a commensurate punishment. The circumstances surrounding each theft determine how it is grouped and the severity of the punishment of the offender. Robberies borne out of destitution known as *Ohiagu* which glosses as 'hunger robberies', often attract mild to moderate punishment. This is because the Igbo believe that every living being needs to stay alive and any means used to satisfy one's hunger is often considered a 'survival crime'. Hunger here encompasses the lack of the basic necessities of life including food, clothing and shelter. Conversely, thieving borne out of dissoluteness attracts severe punishment including death. An offender who has been ascertained not

to be hopeless or helpless and who has other viable options but opts for stealing does not enjoy public sympathies as his destitute counterpart even though both are guilty of one and same crime. One of the factors that can make one a destitute is orphanage. Others include ill health and abject poverty.

Literature captures life and the intrigues of living. It espouses the ideology and discourses of its producing culture. In this regard, WaThiong'o (2003) submits that literary works do not exist in vacuums but are owned and shaped by its producing culture. Abrams and Harpham (2012) aver that ideology is deeply entrenched, underlies the actions of individual members of a society and defines their typical reactions to a situation. The implication thereof is that all actions including the acts of writing, reading and reacting to literature is influenced by ideology. Teays (1996) posits that "each person who tells a story looks at the topic through a filter and that every filter is made up of values, beliefs, assumptions, experience, knowledge (or lack of it) and even desire". Nnolim (2007) lends credence to this view by suggesting that every writer shows even if in a very minute extent, his ideologies in his work. It is in this sense that Eagleton (2008) succinctly says that literature is ideology. Just like the writers, the readers and critics function under the influence of ideology. To this end, Abrams and Harpham (2012) supply that every text embodies codes which the readers internalize as natural because of their cultural ideologies.

More so, every text centers its discourse on a particular theme. Ibitiola (2018) avers that themes are the pivotal topics a text treats and that themes are grouped into two – thematic concept and thematic statement. The former connotes all the discourses surrounding a topic and the various opinions of readers about it whereas the latter consists in what the texts says about a topic and how it says it. Since ideology is the common denominator among the text, writers and readers, there is a very high likelihood that the thematic concepts and statements are to be in tandem. Every text has a subject matter it bases its discussion on. For every discourse, there are at least two opposing views as humans think in dualism. A text selects and privileges one as correct and truthful.

It then weaves its narrative logic to favour its chosen perspective. It is often assumed that a text stays true to its message and as such, searching out the contradictions and inconsistencies therein is rarely the focal point of critics. A surface reading of a text shows off the narrative logic as tight, however, a deliberate and close reading shows that texts undermine their narrative logics.

Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe is an Igbo novel by virtue of the language of penship, authorship and the beliefs it professes. It discusses crime and plots its story around the oppositional factors – dissoluteness and destitution. It contends that it was destitution that led Enyi, the protagonist, into crime. Enyi was a young orphan who was maltreated by his aunt and her children so much so that he fled home. He resorted to crimes especially stealing to help himself. Given the situations surrounding him and its source culture's ideology, the text took sides with Enyi and portrays him as a victim of circumstances who took to crime for survival and not for the love of it. To achieve its aim, the text made light of Enyi's serious and injurious crimes by its choice and use of comical and humorous language to mask the seriousness of the subject matter and throw the reader off the radar. Akpulu (2014) observes that Ubesie hero-worshipped Enyi even though he was a criminal. This paper sets out to demonstrate through a deconstructive reading that although *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* upholds destitution as the factor behind Enyi's crime, it failed to sustain its narrative logic as it also showed dissoluteness as behind his crimes. Pointedly, the objectives of this paper are to:

- i. show how *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* failed to uphold its narrative logic; and
- ii. demonstrate that criminality is a matter of choice.

Synopsis of the Novel

The story opens with Uzodimma, killing his neighbour, Okafọ because he suspects the later of trying to wipe out his lineage. After losing two sons, he was not ready to lose his only child, Enyi, hence, he killed Okafọ. He was arrested, tried and sentenced to death by hanging. Barely a year after his death, his wife died, making Enyi an orphan.

Enyi went to live with his uncle and his family. Nneka, Enyi's aunt hated him because he reminded her of her inability to have a male child. She made life unbearable for Enyi so much so that he fled home. Enyi started living in a school building. He survived on the money he made from bricklaying and ferrying loads at a motor park. At the park, he met and joined some robbers. He was fascinated with the ease at which money was made through robbery that he decided to make a career out of it. Enyi formed and led the most notorious robbery syndicate in Enugu and environs. The police did all within their power to nab Enyi but he was elusive. Enyi and his gang executed a heist on a bank and carted away a huge amount of money. There was a boy, Chukwudi, who was looking for job. Enyi asked him to join them. The police approached Chukwudi and asked him to work undercover and help them gather the evidence with which they will nab Enyi. With the help of Chukwudi, Enyi was arrested, tried and sentenced to jail. Upon his release from prison, Enyi went back to his hometown where he squandered his money and went bankrupt. He considered going back to robbery but reasoned that he may lose his life thus he went into farming and became one of the prosperous farmers in his village.

Literature Review

Destitution is a condition of extreme poverty. It entails the lack of the basic life needs vis-à-vis food, clothing, shelter and access to good health care. Fitzpatrick et al (2016) list shelter, food, heating systems, lighting, clothing including footwear and basic toiletries as life essentials. They aver that destitution is the lack of any two or more of these necessities and /or earning extremely low income that cannot cover the cost of accessing them. Jackman (2017) affirms that a person is a destitute when such a person in addition to the lack of basic needs in life, does not have the required skills or knowledge that is sought to be gainfully employed. A destitute is therefore a member of society who engages in the lowest status of work or who has no means of livelihood. Chingtham (2014) outlines broken homes, abandonment, illness or death of one's parents as some of the leading factors that force children to destitution. Fitzpatrick et al (2016) also aver that as a condition, destitution can be overcome by a

combination of personal hard work, governmental and societal interventions.

Dissoluteness involves deliberately going against societal standards. It is the love for immorality. Morals are those ideas and acts upheld as virtues by a given society. Gert (2002) states that morality can be defined in two broad senses – descriptively and normatively. Descriptively, it designates certain codes of conduct promulgated by an individual, group or society. Normatively, it consists in codes of conduct that rational people from various societies and social standing uphold. This means that the issue of morality can be relative and universal. Relative in the sense that what is acceptable in one community may be unacceptable to another and universal in the sense that there are acts or ideas that are approved of or condemned in all groups. For instance, corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure is acceptable to the Igbo and Africans at large but unacceptable to Americans and other western countries. However, there is yet to be a country that approves of stealing. This means that generally, stealing is morally wrong.

Milo (1984) avers that immorality consists in any blameworthy behaviour. He divulges that Aristotle classified immorality into two categories, the ones that stem from wickedness and the one that flows from weakness. Immorality informed from compunction is weakness whereas immorality committed deliberately is wickedness. To this end, he states that weakness based immorality be addressed as 'amoral' whereas wickedness based immorality should be described as 'immoral'. He further informs that the major difference between immoral and amoral acts is that the agent of the former causes harm to all except him or herself whereas the agent of the later bears the chunk of the brunt of his or her actions. The far reaching implication thereof is that an agent may engage in an unapproved behaviour willingly or under compunction. When applied to a crime scenario, a criminal may act out of helplessness or out of indiscretion. It is then right to question the motive behind an act, especially criminal acts. An individual may engage in criminal acts out of dissoluteness or destitution. Criminal acts borne out of destitution often attract sympathy and such a criminal is offered help whilst a dissolute

criminal is deservedly punished. In this case, the motives of destitution and dissoluteness form a binary pair where the former is privileged and the later subservient.

Theoretical Framework

The theory to which this study subscribes to its tenets is the deconstruction literary theory. The choice of this theory is informed by its appropriateness to the achievement of the objectives of the paper. Deconstruction is a multidisciplinary approach to textual analysis which aims to show the inability of language to capture meaning, fluidity of meaning and to displace hierarchies. It is a strategy proposed by Derrida (1994) for reading anything with the aim of demonstrating that nothing has a static meaning.

Deconstruction kicked off as a reaction against the western ideology and some tenets of the structuralism theory. This is why it is also known as post-structuralism even though the term is generic for all the theories that came after structuralism and sought to upturn the status quo. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2010), Derrida following the insights of structuralism, concedes that humans make meaning from oppositions. However, he observes that oppositional terms are never considered as equals. One pair of an opposition is ranked higher and more substantial than its counterpart. The side to be privileged depends on the conventions of a group. These conventions follow after a certain principle which serves as the fulcrum for ordering. Dobie (2012) reports that Derrida refers to the ordering principle as *Logos* and avers that terms such as God, first principle and culture are terms used to describe the logos in various groups. She further hints that Derrida calls any society or individual that believes in a Logos, logocentric. Derrida summed up the acts of oppositional thinking, hierarchical rankings and logocentricism to mean *metaphysics*. Eagleton (2008) explains that following his observations, Derrida set out to demonstrate that opposites are not absolutes since they symbiotically relate to illumine each other. Hinging on the precepts of the structuralists that meaning lies in differences instead of similarities, Derrida argues that rather than negate themselves, oppositions complement themselves. He terms this reliance of binary oppositions on each other,

supplement. He further argues that since binary oppositions supplement themselves, it is futile and erroneous to privilege one over the other. He insists that all oppositions are co-substantial and should be treated as such. Borrowing the insights of the structuralists on the nature of meaning, Derrida claims that meaning is not constant rather, it shifts from one context to another. According to the structuralists, meaning is not natural, it is arbitrary following the conventions of a group of people (Abrams and Harpham, 2012). This explains why the name of an item varies from one culture to another and why what constitutes a deviance in one culture is accepted in another. Derrida terms this provisional nature of meaning, *differance*. He avows that any meaning realized at any point in time is as valid as those realized before and after it. Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell (2010) aver that Derrida ties up his arguments on the transient nature of meaning by positing that language which is the only viable means of communication accessible to man is in itself unstable and therefore is incapable of producing a stable meaning.

Nnamdi-Eruchalu (2015) explains that language in all its forms is marred by some inherent attributes such as ambiguity, contextuality and arbitrariness. These and other properties of language make it impossible for a word, situation or concept to have a static meaning. It is then Derrida's argument that since our thoughts are conceived and expressed in language, it is impossible for our thoughts to be assigned a singular meaning. Derrida's ideas have been adopted by many disciplines including literature.

As a literary practice, deconstruction strives to show that texts undermine the very perspective it upholds albeit inadvertently. According to Derrida (1994), there are points when a text inadvertently turns right back to condemn that which it set out to uphold and to exalt that which it proposed to subdue. He calls these points *Aporia*. de Man (1983) who is considered the champion of literary deconstruction prefers the term *blind spots* to designate the instances of negation found in a text. Habib (2011) says that a text comes to an aporetic juncture when it fails to completely extol one view over another. This is because exaltations are done

at the expense of condemnations and vice versa. For a text to successfully make an idea dominant, it must simultaneously subdue its opposite and binary pair. A text is then forced to an impasse if it praises and condemns an idea at the same time. Derrida (1994) explains that why a text involuntarily attacks itself is because it is expressed in language. He argues that inasmuch as language in all its forms is our only source of expression, it is marred by some qualities such as duality, arbitrariness and ambiguity which make it unstable. He avows that an unstable means cannot produce a stable outcome. Since language divides against itself, all things divide against themselves including meaning of literary texts. Language is not whole therefore it cannot occasion wholeness. This informs Caputo (1997) witty explanation of deconstruction as seeking out a whole in order to crack it open.

Dobie (2012) posits that every text embodies contradictions and inconsistencies that make it impossible for it to stay true to its narrative logic. Eagleton (2008) sums up the deconstructive practice as demonstrating that between two viable options or opinions, none is better or higher than the other. Rather than oppositions, binary pairs are co substantial only that both just like paradigms cannot co- occur at once. Using the deconstructive lens, the paper looks at the binary motives of destitution and dissoluteness so as show that since both motives can occasion crimes, there is then a blurry line between them.

Empirical Studies

Scholars have used the deconstructive lens to interpret literary texts. One of such scholars is Meister (2012) who performed a deconstructive reading of Guy de Maupassant's *The Diamond Necklace*. She worked with the individual/society binary pairs and read against the text's stance that Mme Loisel's immorality was borne out of discontentment. She pointed out how society prioritized material wellbeing thereby forcing its members to embrace all means including immorality to meet up with societal standards. Avoidance of societal ridicule and gaining approval was then the motive behind Mme Loisel's deviance. Meister's study tries to justify a protagonist's immorality by shedding light on her vulnerability. This paper tries to do the opposite.

Unlike *The Diamond Necklace*, *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* is sympathetic towards the protagonist. Rather than condemn, it justifies the protagonist's immorality. In the same vein, Akudigwe (2014) treated *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* as a pedagogical text and sought to use it to showcase the ills of bad parenting. Using the psychoanalytic theory of Sigmund Freud, she insists that Enyi's immorality is an effect of poor parenting citing that Enyi's treatment to society is a reflection of the kind of example Nneka showed him. She asserts that Nneka failed in her duties as a guardian to Enyi and as such, Enyi is absolved of his misdeeds. The stances of Meister (2012) and Akudigwe (2014) even though in different contexts, indicate that crimes are justifiable. This line of thought is dangerous as it may encourage members of society to resort to crime when faced with difficulties.

Purwano (2017) also used the deconstructive lens to examine Okonkwo's character in *Things Fall Apart*. He attacked previous readings of the novel which portray Okonkwo as a tragic-hero. According to these other readings, Okonkwo was under the psychological burden of living above his father who was described as a coward. As such he killed Obierika not out of wickedness but out of weakness. Sparing Obierika would have made him a coward just like his father. Nonetheless, Purwano contends that rather than a tragic hero, Okonkwo is an anti-hero who is self-centered and who killed out of wickedness instead of weakness. Purwano is of the view that crimes should not be excused; after all, there is a sense in which wickedness is a weakness.

This paper will therefore employ the strategies of deconstruction in the reading of *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe*, hinging on the binary pair of dissoluteness and destitution to establish the motive behind the immoral behaviours of the protagonist of the novel.

Methodology

The type of study done is the qualitative. Data are sourced from Ubesie's *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe*. The strategies of the deconstructive practice are used to tease out the binary pairs and hierarchies. This is done by paying close attention to the narrative logic and language of narration. Thereafter, the hierarchies are displaced by

demonstrating how both sides inhere in each other. Finally, a thick description which ties the narrative logic to its 'Logos' in this case, the Igbo beliefs is offered.

Findings and Discussions

In the foreword, the text posed a pertinent question "*onye mere mmadu ji zuwe ohi na chukwu kere ya, kwe ka onwunwa kariri ya dakwasị ya; na onye ahụ nhịahụ mere, o bido zuwe ohi, onye ka uta dirị?*" [iii] (One that led another to steal, fate that wreaked havoc on one, and one who steals due to destitution, who is to blame?)

A surface reading of the text will readily blame fate and society for forcing Enyi to turn to crime, thereby absolving Enyi of most, if not all the blames, especially given that he repented at the end. Fate is indicted on the basis of Enyi's orphanage. Enyi was only four when he lost both parents and came to live with his relatives [9]. Society is implicated on two count charges. In the first instance, it was as a result of Okafọ's wickedness that Uzodimma killed him and was consequently sentenced to death [1]. Although it was not stated explicitly, it was insinuated that Chinyere, Enyi's mother, was poisoned [3]. Society is also guilty on Nneka's account for it was the inhumane treatments she meted out on Enyi that drove him to abandon home and get entangled in crime. Thus, fate initiated Enyi's woes and society worsened it. A traditional reading therefore convicts fate and society for being responsible for Enyi's deviant acts. Hence, they are the villains and Enyi, the victim of circumstances and a destitute.

Nonetheless, a deconstructive reading attests that Enyi is neither as unlucky nor as helpless as purported by a traditional reading. A look at the circumstances as well as the cause of death of Uzodimma, Enyi's father, proves that fate is not as culpable as it is painted. Uzodimma did not die at the hands of fate, rather, he died as a

N'ime ndụ Enyi niile, o nweghị mgbe o ji mara na o bụ Chukwudi wetaara ya ajọ odachi jekwudoro ya. Enyi nyirị ndị uwe ojii, ma o maghị na o bụ Chukwudi bụ nwamba o ku n'ahụ, takaara ya akwa n'ihì na mmadu buru mbe, a chọwara ya onye didebere ya ka o ghoorọ ya mmiri oku ndi ozọ ga-eji wugbuo ya [67]

result of his irrational and poor decisions. Of all the options available to Uzodimma to protect his family from Okafọ's wickedness, he chose murder. "*Uzodimma wee...wakwu ya, gbuo*" [2] (Uzodimma then struck and killed him). He had the options of moving away, preparing his own charm or inviting a diviner to help destroy the talisman Okafọ used in killing his sons. His wife took the last option albeit lately for her husband had already been hung. Chinyere invited a diviner, Chinweuba, who destroyed Okafọ's amulet and healed Enyi [6-7]. It is therefore, Uzodimma, who made his family vulnerable. He killed Okafọ so as to forestall his family from dying, but although it was not stated explicitly, Okafọ's wife poisoned his wife thereby not only making his efforts futile but also illuminating how senseless and irrational his first line of action was. More still, had he not occasioned his own death by his poor decisions, he would have been there to protect his family and if we were to assume that Chinyere died of a natural cause, Uzodimma would have been there for Enyi. This shows that fate played little or no part in Enyi's outcome.

The text is titled "*Mmiri oku e ji egbu mbe*" (Hot water used to kill the Tortoise). The tortoise is not a character in the text; this signposts that the title does not have a literal meaning. Figuratively, Enyi is the tortoise even though it is ironical, given his physique and name. *Enyi* means Elephant in the Igbo language. He is mapped unto the tortoise because tortoise is the symbol of cunningness in Igbo culture. He is a metaphorical tortoise in the sense that he had remained elusive so much so that all the plans hatched to nab him failed. Until a certain character, Chukwudi, came in and assisted the police, thus, he became the hot water with which Enyi, the elusive tortoise was finally nabbed. This stance is supported by the text;

All through Enyi's life, he never knew that Chukwudi was behind his ill-fate. The police could not apprehend Enyi but he did not know that Chukwudi was the one that let the cat out of the bag because if one becomes the tortoise, his close ally will be used as the hot water with which he will be killed.

Chukwudi played two distinct roles in the text. Besides giving the police the break they needed to arrest and bring Enyi to justice, he is also the hot water used to kill the tortoise because through him, the logic that it was destitution that drove Enyi into criminality is overthrown. Chukwudi was as desolate as Enyi. He had no means of livelihood and was hopeless [31]. He had the options of joining Enyi to rob or staying on the side of the law. Even though robbery was more lucrative, he chose to stay by the law [31]. He worked undercover to bring Enyi to justice. He is therefore Enyi's foil. He helps to draw attention to the fact that Enyi stole out of dissoluteness and not out of destitution.

The text informs that Enyi is very much like his father except in stealing [52]. This implies that he is prone to taking irrational and hasty decisions. Enyi left home impulsively. Even though Nneka and her children were mean to him, he knew his uncle and family are his only relatives. He had no place or anyone to go to, yet, just like his father, he decided that it was better to face the consequences and without actually considering the far reaching implications of his decisions, he left home. No one chased Enyi out. He had the option of waiting for his uncle who was said to be kind to him to return from travel to lay his complaints. Like his father, he was not sane enough to weigh his options and also like his father, he made a decision that proved to be poor.

Furthermore, after leaving home, Enyi settled in a school building which was enough shelter for him as it was not reported that he suffered any form of disturbances there [22]. He got himself mason jobs whenever he could [24]. The job was not steady, thus, he went for ferrying loads for people at a park [24]. From these menial jobs, he made a decent living until once again he 'decided' that coming from the school building where he had been staying to the park was strenuous and inconvenient. Hence, he packed up and moved to

the park. Enyi's decision proved to be poor and imprudent as it was upon moving to the park that he commingled with thieves and became one [24]. He was amazed and pleased with the amount of money as well as the ease with which the money

was made through robbery that he decided to make a career out of stealing. Besides the mangoes at the white man's quarters which the text says that stealing it was a rite of passage for every child in Enugu [19], Enyi never stole as a result of hunger. This confirms that he stole not out of destitution but of dissoluteness.

More still, Enyi was into organised crime from whence he made a lot of money. If it were truly destitution that drove him into robbery, he would have stopped at some point and invested his money decently but he rather used his money to acquire arms and ammunitions with which to step up his game [51]. When his cohorts were arrested and jailed, that would have served as a deterrent to him but he relocated and continued petty thieving while awaiting the release of his gang members from prison so that they could continue where they stopped. Upon the release of his gang members, he took his robbery two spates or more notches higher [50]. Moreover, when Enyi came back to his hometown (which by the way makes one wonder why he did not go there in the first place when he abandoned Nneka's home) to cool off his heels, his people approached him and promised to see to his needs if he would help curb stealing in Ndiabia. This was done because the community thought it was destitution that led him to steal and in a bid to stop him from stealing. Despite providing Enyi with all his wants, he continued thieving [42-49]. All these confirm that Enyi stole out of dissoluteness not out of destitution.

In furtherance, a close look at the relationship between Enyi and society proves the latter to be at the receiving end. Enyi perpetrated crimes ranging from violence, robbery to vindictiveness against members of society. Just like his father, Enyi exhibited violence when he hit the white man's servant on the chest and killed their dog said to be valued as a child all in a bid to escape [20-21; 23-24]. Enyi was guilty of numerous spates of robberies that left members of society desolate and fearful. His thieving escapades include stealing a Hausa man's money [25], stealing cigarettes from a poor unsuspecting girl [26], stealing Mazi Anigbogu's livestock [30], stealing a man's yam [43], stealing from neighbouring villages [47-8], stealing from the police [54] and carrying out a heist at a bank in

Zengu [58-62] to mention but the conspicuous ones. Enyi went as far as using diabolical means to shield himself from being discovered and held responsible for the series of robberies in Ndiabia [43].

More so, members of society were victims of Enyi's reckless and malicious vindictiveness. Enyi set Nwanyimma up and indicted her of stealing meat from the pot because Nneka accused and disgraced him and he sought to avenge her [15-16]. He set Pita up to a situation where he nearly lost his life because it was Pita that caught him stealing from a little girl and raised alarm [25-26]. Still, he set Nduka and Uzochukwu up and got them unceremoniously dismissed from the police force for making extra efforts to nab him [41; 55]. In Nduka's case, he even went to prison. Also, Enyi raised false alarm on the young men that escorted him to steal a cow from a neighbouring town and got them flogged because they wanted to share the spoils with him. In all these cases, the accused were innocent. Worst still, Enyi made members of society use the knowledge society bequeathed them against it. The ex-soldier, the war veteran and Nduka were given special training by society on how to fight crime. Incidentally, they used the knowledge to aid Enyi in perpetrating crimes successfully. Even more, Enyi defaulted and reneged on the pact he made with members of Ndiabia community by continuing to steal which contravenes their terms of agreement [47]. In all, wherever Enyi went, he left members of society fretful and fearful [28, 42, 54, 50].

In the face of all these villainous acts against it, society together with fate, kept faith with Enyi. But for a member of society, Enyi would have drowned in Bature River. It was the washer man that rescued and administered saving help to Enyi [12]. When Enyi was rightly accused by the Hausa man of stealing his money, society gave him a fair hearing and saved him from the punishment he deserved [25]. Instead, Pita was mobbed without giving a fair hearing on Enyi's account [25-26]. By implication, Pita paid for Enyi's crime. Still, when Enyi was to be arraigned before the court on the charge of stealing, the woman whose child Enyi robbed, graciously forgave and set him free [26]. Society provided succor for Enyi after his parents' death. It was a

member of society in the person of his uncle that took him in. Also, when he decided to abandon home, he settled in social facilities free of charge (the school building and motor-park he lived in). Society even provided jobs for him (bricklaying and ferrying of loads) and he had access to health care [38]. Society sent Enyi at least two times to prison in the hope of rehabilitating him all to no avail. Members of society were open to Enyi taking their things insofar as he does not leave them stranded [42]. It was not recorded that society segregated Enyi on the account of his lifestyle. Regardless of his depredation towards it, in what can be described as an immeasurable show of love, society received Enyi with open arms when he decided to turn a new leaf. Enyi following the dissipation of his money for once, weighed his options and 'decided' that resorting back to stealing may end his life as age was no longer on his side [66].

This then implies that Enyi repented not out of remorse. Regardless, society was benevolent enough to reach out to him. When Enyi demonstrated his resolve to farm, members of society came out enmasse to support him. "*Obi di mmadu dum mma, nke bu na umu okorobia e nwere n'obodo weputara onwe ha jewe ikoro Enyi ugbo*" [67] (Everyone was happy, so much so that the young men in the town volunteered to cultivate for Enyi). For once, Enyi took a calculated decision. He did something differently and achieved a different yet better result. This lends credence to the stance that poor, impulsive and irrational decisions are responsible for Enyi's woes.

On the part of fate, fate did well by Enyi. For taking his mother, assuming it was responsible, fate compensated Enyi by its unwavering support. Fate provided fishes for him when Nneka would not give him. Fate protected Enyi and made him elusive. Save for the incident where Pita caught him, he carried out his robberies successfully and even at that, fate prevailed on the woman to set him free. The very day Enyi would have been netted, fate intervened and he was sick [36]. Also, it was fate that prevailed on Nduka to be faithful to Enyi by keeping his money. Given the pains Enyi caused Nduka in the past, nothing stops him

from keeping back the money Enyi confidentially kept in his care. In addition, when Enyi started farming, fate made his harvest bountiful so much that five years after, he became one of the rich and eminent members of society. Fate did not hold him accountable for his past deeds. It rather absolved him of his guilt.

It may be argued that it was also fate that sent Chukwudi, Enyi's way. However, fate's action were ordered and geared towards bringing Enyi to a good end. If Enyi had not gone to prison and his gang members dispersed, he would have continued stealing and perhaps, lose his life as he had feared. Besides, fate also needed to give society respite from Enyi's nefarious activities. In essence, fate mediated fairly between Enyi and society. Going back to the question raised ab initio, it is surmised that neither fate, society nor the individual is to be condemned or exonerated for they are all indicted even though in varying degrees. This forces the text to an impasse and therefore deconstructs it.

Thick Description of the Text

The deconstructive reading demonstrates that the text is in aporia, having failed to completely indict or absolve any of the accused. Nonetheless, the text seemed to be sympathetic towards Enyi. The rationale behind the text's position is not farfetched as it can be traced to the ideology of its producing culture. Green (1997) states that language mirrors life and it projects the lived experiences, customs, likes and dislikes of people. By virtue of being written in the Igbo language, and following Green's view, the text espouses Igbo prevalent philosophies. According to Ubesie (2004), In Igbo traditional religion, there is a supreme god and other lesser gods. Together, these gods preordain one's fate. Each person has a personal *chi*, who determines what will befall one. It is believed that the wind of ill luck only blows one if his personal *chi* allows it. Hence, when one narrowly escapes being hurt, the Igbo say "*Chi ya azo ya*" (His personal *chi* has saved him) and/ or "*Onye chi ya akwatughị, anaghị ada*" (one who is not pushed by his *chi* does not fall). It is on the basis of this belief that the text attributed Enyi's orphanage to fate and indicted it for making him vulnerable.

The text indicts society on the basis of

forcing Enyi to turn to crime. The Igbo believe in '*nkwanye*' that is to force someone into doing something. When someone is pushed to the limit and is left with no option, s/he resorts to any available means to survive. Igbo ideology supports this stance and this is evidenced by the sayings "*Ahughị ka e mere, e mee ka a hụrụ*" and "*Mberede nyirị dike ma mberede ka e ji ama dike*" (when the going gets tough, the tough gets going). Also the wellerism "*Aturụ sị na ya amaghị egwu agba ma a kuru egwu bata be ya, ka ya na-amaghị agba, ya wụwa ya awụwa*" (The sheep said that it is true that it does not know how to dance but when the music enters his compound, if he cannot dance to the rhythm, he would dance off tune). This informs why the text seemed to rationalise Enyi's degenerate acts and even Uzodimma's action of killing Okafọ. More so, the Igbo regard '*enwenna, enwenna*' (an orphan) as helpless and susceptible to maltreatment from members of society, especially relatives, as they are certain that no one will come to their defense. This stance is reinforced by the fact that the maltreatment of the orphan is a common motif among the diverse forms of Igbo folkloric tales. Based on this, the text is disposed to making excuses for Enyi.

Even more, the text seemed to justify Enyi's vindictiveness. It presented his revenges as a case of cause and effect. The Igbo are of the view that vengeance is not bad. They profess that "*E mee, m booro abughị ajo ihe*" (Exerting vengeance is not evil). They also say "*mmadu asoghị uburu m taa m aru n'isi, agaghị m aso nsị wee taa ya aru n'ike*" (if one is not mindful of my brains and bites me on the head, I too will not mind the excreta in his anus and bite at it). This apprises why vindictiveness was upheld by the text.

More so, the Igbo accept as true, the assertion that the best advice is the one, one gives oneself. This informs why all the efforts made by Ndjabia indigenes and society at large to rehabilitate Enyi was futile. It was only when Enyi advised himself that he really changed for good. Nevertheless, by the virtue of the deconstruction of the text, these beliefs are deconstructed and shown not to be as fool proof as presumed.

Conclusion

The deconstructive reading shows that texts are inescapably caught in the webs of

contradictions and inconsistencies. Through its language and mode of narration, *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* privileged the view that it was destitution, brought about by the joint efforts of fate and society that led Enyi into crime. The story was presented in such a way as to show Enyi as helpless and without options. However, in so doing, the text undermined its narrative logic by errors from its blind-spots. It failed to sustain the logic that it was destitution that led Enyi into crime when Enyi resorted to stealing even when there were other means of livelihood such as bricklaying and ferrying of loads, when he continued to steal even when he had made a lot of money that he would have invested into a legitimate business, and when he would have continued stealing but for the reason that age was no longer on his side. By virtue of these blind-spots, the text inadvertently shows dissoluteness as behind Enyi's crime. Even more, the text was yet unsuccessful at establishing

dissoluteness as the motive, as the roles of fate and society cannot be overlooked. Fate it was that initiated Enyi's woes by virtue of his orphanage and society worsened it by cruelty on the parts of Nneka and her children. The inability to establish and sustain destitution or dissoluteness as a motive and the overlap of both factors, force *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe* to an impasse and therefore, deconstructs it. Enyi's deviance can then be tied to a joint factor of dissoluteness and destitution and by extension, self-will.

Furthermore, the text's logos, the Igbo ideology from whence it draws its meaning has proved not to be as steady and infallible as purported. As an ultimate referent, it should have been able to support a premise to a logical end. However, it failed to support either side of the binary – dissoluteness/destitution. The inability to completely uphold a perspective shows the vulnerability of ideology.

References

- Abrams, M. H. & Harpham, G. G. (2012). *A glossary of literary terms* (10th ed.). Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Akpulu, E. O. (2008). Ubesie dika onye na-eto dike: Nnyocha Juo Obinna na *Mmiri Oku E Ji Egbu Mbe*. B.A. project, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.
- Akudigwe, C. A. (2014). Nziputa ajo ozuzu nwa na nsogbu ya n'iduuzi ndi a hoozo. B.A. project, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.
- Caputo, J. D. (1997). *Deconstruction in a nutshell: A conversation with Jacques Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Chingtam, T. (2014). Causes and facilities of destitute children in the children homes. *Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 4(6), 50-53.
- De Man, P. (1983). *Blindness and insight: Essays in the rhetoric of contemporary criticism* (2nd ed.). London: Methuen.
- Derrida, J. (1994). *Of grammatology*. Chakravorty, S. (Trans.). Delhi: Montilla Publisher.
- Dobie, A. (2012). *Theory into practice: An introduction to literary criticism* (3rd ed.). Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary theory: An introduction* (ann.ed.). Malden: Blackwell Publishing.
- Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., Filip, S., Blenkissop, J., Johnsen, M., Netto, G., & Watts, B. (2016). *Destitution in the UK*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.
- Gert, B. (2002). Morality. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy.
- Goring, P., Hawthorn, J., & Mitchell, D. (2010). *Studying literature*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing
- Green, T. (1997). *Folklore: An encyclopedia of beliefs, customs, tales music and art*. Santa-Babra: ABC – CLIO.
- Habib, M. A. R. (2011). *Literary criticism from Plato to the present: An introduction*. Malden: Willy-Blackwell.
- Haralambous, M., Holborne, M., Chapman, S. & Moore, S. (2013). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives* (8th ed.). London: Harper Collins Publishers.
- Ibitola, A. O. (2018). *Essential literature-in-English for senior secondary schools*. Ibafo: Tonad Publishers.
- Jackman, D. (2017). Destitution. Retrieved from Journal.sage pub.com.

- Kennedy, X. J. & Gioia, D. (2010). *Literature: An introduction to fiction, poetry and writing* (11th Ed.). New York: Longman/ Pearson
- Meister, K. (2012). The blame game. In A. B. Dobie, *Theory into practice* (pp.172-174). Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Milo, R. D. (1984). *Immorality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Murfin, R. & Ray, S. M. (1998). *The Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms*. Boston: Bedford/Martins.
- Nnamdi-Eruchalu, G. I. (2015). *An introduction to general linguistics* (2nd ed.). Awka: Fab Educational Books
- Nnolim, C. (2009). *Morning yet on criticism day: The criticism of African literature in the twentieth century*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press.
- Purwano, P. (2017). Cannibalistic Okonkwo: A deconstructive perspective of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Retrieved from [https:// doi.org/10.31227/osf.101wxsh6](https://doi.org/10.31227/osf.101wxsh6). Accessed on 16/08/17.
- Ritzer, G. & Stepnisky, J. (2014). *Sociological theory*. New York: McGraw Hill Education.
- Teays, W. (1996). *Second thoughts: Critical thinking from a multicultural perspective*. California: Mayfield Publishing.
- Ubesie, T. U. (1974). *Mmiri oku e ji egbu mbe*. Ikeja: Longman Nigeria.
- WaThiong'o, N. (2007). Writers in politics: the power of words and the words of power. In T. Olaniyan & A. Quayson (Eds.), *Africa literature: An anthology of criticism and theory*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.