MATERIAL WEALTH AS SOCIAL CURRENCY: ANALYSIS OF THE POEM "ONYE NAỊJIRỊA" IN *UTARA NTI*

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Abstract

Material wealth had increasingly become an important basis for social recognition, status attribution, and perceived success in contemporary Nigerian society. Possessions such as houses, vehicles, clothing, jewelry, businesses, and other visible commodities were often used as indicators of an individual's social and economic standing. Consequently, individuals were sometimes evaluated more by what they possessed and displayed than by their character, integrity, or contributions to society. This tendency encouraged conspicuous consumption and placed social pressure on individuals, particularly youths, to acquire visible symbols of success, sometimes through questionable means. This study examined the representation of material wealth as a social currency of worth in Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem's poem, "Onye Naịjirịa," published in Ụtara Ntị. The study adopted Symbolic Interactionism, drawing particularly on the perspectives of George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Herbert Blumer, as its theoretical framework. Through qualitative textual analysis, the study examined the material possessions, social relationships, symbols of authority, and patterns of recognition represented in the poem. The analysis revealed that vehicles, clothing, buildings, romantic relationships, traditional and social titles, overseas experiences, financial capacity, and conspicuous expenditure functioned as symbols through which individuals were assessed and socially ranked. The poem further exposed the tendency to equate material possession with achievement, influence, and personal worth, while paying limited attention to moral character and integrity. The study also found that the social meanings attached to material possessions were products of interaction and collective perception, making wealth a form of symbolic currency within the social environment represented in the poem. It concluded that although material prosperity remained desirable and important to individual and societal development, it should not have been treated as the primary measure of human worth, moral character, or social value. The study therefore highlighted the need for a broader conception of success that recognised integrity, responsibility, meaningful social contribution, and human dignity alongside material achievement.

Keywords: Material Wealth, Social Currency, Social Status, Symbolic Interactionism, "Onye Naịjirịa"

Introduction

Wealth is generally understood in economic terms as the accumulation of valuable resources and assets that provide individuals, households, organisations, or societies with economic security and the capacity to satisfy material needs. Beyond its economic function, however, wealth possesses considerable social significance. In many societies, material possessions have become important instruments through which individuals communicate their social

identity, demonstrate achievement, establish prestige, and negotiate their position within the social structure. Consequently, wealth is not only what an individual owns; it may also determine how that individual is perceived, approached, respected, or categorized by others. In this sense, material wealth can function as a form of social currency.

The concept of social currency in this context refers to the social value that individuals derive from possessions, relationships, appearances, influence, and other resources that enable them to gain recognition, acceptance, prestige, or access within a social environment. Currency ordinarily facilitates exchange and determines the value attached to goods and services. In a similar manner, material wealth can facilitate social exchange by enabling individuals to acquire recognition, influence, admiration, authority, and social acceptance. A luxury vehicle, an imposing residence, expensive clothing, jewelry, foreign travel, or an influential social connection may therefore possess a value that extends beyond its economic or practical usefulness. Such possessions communicate particular meanings to members of society and may consequently affect the social position of their owners.

The transformation of material possessions into social currency is closely related to the ways societies construct meanings around objects. A car, for instance, is primarily a means of transportation. However, particular brands of cars may acquire symbolic meanings associated with affluence, prestige, sophistication, or power. Similarly, a building is fundamentally a shelter or an investment, but the size, location, architectural design, and number of buildings owned by an individual may become indicators of economic achievement. Clothing may serve the basic function of covering the body, yet particular brands, fabrics, accessories, and designers can communicate social class and economic capacity. Thus, material objects can acquire meanings that exceed their functional purposes.

This phenomenon is particularly visible in contemporary Nigerian society, where material displays increasingly constitute part of everyday social interaction. Individuals are often introduced, described, or evaluated in relation to their occupations, businesses, possessions, social connections, and visible lifestyles. The vehicle an individual drives, the neighbourhood in which the person resides, the nature of the person's house, the clothing worn to social functions, the schools attended by the individual's children, the nature of businesses owned, and the frequency of international travel may influence public perceptions of the individual's success. In certain social contexts, the possession of expensive material goods may generate respect even before the character, competence, or moral standing of the individual is established.

The importance attached to material appearance is also evident in social gatherings and public occasions. At weddings, funerals, political events, religious functions, business meetings, and other social gatherings, material appearance may influence the attention and treatment individuals receive. The quality of one's clothing, accessories, vehicle, or social connections may determine how one is received and the category of people with whom one is associated. Such practices reveal that material possessions have become embedded in the symbolic organisation of social life.

The contemporary media environment has further intensified this phenomenon. Social media platforms provide individuals with unprecedented opportunities to display their lifestyles to

large audiences. Photographs of luxury cars, expensive houses, foreign trips, designer clothing, business achievements, elaborate celebrations, and other manifestations of affluence are frequently presented as evidence of success. The distinction between having wealth and displaying wealth consequently becomes increasingly blurred. Material possessions are not only acquired for personal use but may also be deliberately displayed because of the social meanings attached to them.

The entertainment industry provides another significant example. Musicians, actors, social media personalities, entrepreneurs, and other public figures are frequently associated with lifestyles characterized by conspicuous consumption. Their vehicles, houses, clothing, jewelry, holidays, businesses, and social networks may become part of their public identity. The visibility of such lifestyles can influence the aspirations of younger members of society, who may come to associate success primarily with the ability to acquire and display expensive possessions. Thorstein Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption is useful in understanding this development. Veblen observes that individuals may consume goods not merely for their utility but also to demonstrate economic strength and social distinction. Consumption consequently becomes communicative. What an individual owns and displays can communicate information about the person's perceived position within society. In the Nigerian context, conspicuous consumption may therefore operate as a mechanism for obtaining social recognition and distinguishing oneself from others.

The social significance of material wealth raises questions about the criteria used to determine human worth. When material possessions become dominant indicators of success, other dimensions of human value such as character, integrity, knowledge, competence, compassion, responsibility, and contribution to society may receive less attention. A person may be considered successful because of the size of a house, the number of cars owned, the brand of clothing worn, or the amount of money displayed, even when little is known about the person's ethical conduct. Conversely, individuals who lack conspicuous material possessions may be regarded as unsuccessful or socially insignificant regardless of their intellectual, moral, or professional qualities. This situation can produce considerable social pressure. Individuals may feel compelled to acquire possessions that exceed their actual economic capacity because of the desire to maintain a particular social image. Young people, in particular, may encounter expectations that equate adulthood and achievement with expensive lifestyles, luxury possessions, foreign travel, influential connections, and visible economic success. Where legitimate economic opportunities are limited, the pressure to attain these symbols of success may create conditions in which individuals become vulnerable to unethical or illegal means of acquiring wealth.

The issue is therefore not simply the possession of wealth but the social meaning attached to wealth. Material prosperity is not inherently problematic. Economic advancement can improve living conditions, create employment, provide educational opportunities, enhance social welfare, and contribute to community development. The problem arises when material wealth becomes the principal currency through which social value is negotiated. When wealth determines who receives respect, who is considered successful, who gains access to influential circles, and whose voice is taken seriously, material possession moves beyond its

economic function and assumes a powerful social function.

It is this transformation of material wealth from an economic resource into a mechanism of social recognition that provides the central concern of this study. The study is particularly interested in how literary texts reflect and interrogate such social realities. Literature does not exist independently of the society from which it emerges. Poets, playwrights, and novelists frequently respond to the values, contradictions, aspirations, and tensions present within their social environments. Igbo written poetry, in particular, has continued to provide a significant medium through which social behavior, cultural values, interpersonal relationships, morality, politics, and contemporary experiences are represented and critiqued. Within this context, Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem's poem "Onye Naịjirịa", published in Ụtara Ntị, provides a compelling representation of the relationship between material wealth and social recognition. The poem is constructed largely through a series of rhetorical questions concerning the possessions, relationships, influence, and social visibility of the Nigerian individual. Rather than asking about the individual's character, intellectual ability, moral principles, or contribution to society, the speaker asks about cars, clothing, accessories, romantic relationships, buildings, kingship, money, foreign connections, and the number of people who interact with the individual.

According to Thorstein (1899) individuals may engage in conspicuous consumption, deliberately acquiring and displaying material possessions as visible expressions of wealth, social status, and prestige. In this regard, material possessions can serve as informal indicators through which society evaluates achievement and assigns social standing. Similarly, Bourdieu (1986) explains that economic resources constitute a form of capital that can be transformed into social advantages, including prestige, influence, and access to opportunities. Thus, individuals with substantial material resources may command greater social recognition and occupy more privileged positions within society.

ConceptualFramework

The conceptual framework of this study is built around the interconnected concepts of wealth, material wealth, social currency, and affluence. These concepts are central to understanding the representation of material possessions as instruments of social recognition and status in Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem's "Onye Naịjirịa" in Ụtara Ntị. Although wealth is primarily associated with economic resources, its significance extends beyond economic value when the possessions associated with it become symbols through which individuals communicate identity, status, achievement, power, and social belonging. The conceptual discussion therefore establishes the relationship between material possession and the social meanings attached to such possession.

Wealth

Wealth is a broad economic and social concept referring to the accumulation or possession of valuable resources and assets. It is commonly associated with the capacity of an individual, household, organisation, or nation to satisfy present needs, maintain economic security, and generate future benefits. Unlike income, which generally refers to the flow of earnings

received over a period, wealth represents a stock of accumulated resources.

Smith (1776), in *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, associates wealth with the productive activities of land and labour. His conception places emphasis on production as an important source of economic prosperity. Mill (1848), on the other hand, views wealth in terms of useful or desirable things that possess exchange value. This conception expands wealth beyond money to include resources and commodities capable of satisfying human needs.

Marshall (1890) similarly conceptualizes wealth in relation to material goods that satisfy human wants and possess exchange value. Pigou (1920) extends the economic understanding of wealth to include those resources that can be brought directly or indirectly into relation with monetary measurement. These classical economic perspectives establish wealth primarily in relation to material resources, utility, value, and exchange. Contemporary scholarship, however, has broadened the meaning of wealth. Hamilton and Hepburn (2014) distinguish wealth from income by describing it as a stock of assets that can generate future income and consumption. Killewald, Pfeffer, and Schachner (2017) conceptualize wealth in terms of the value of assets after liabilities have been deducted. Such assets may include financial resources, real estate, businesses, vehicles, and other valuable possessions.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) similarly considers household wealth in terms of financial and non-financial assets after liabilities have been taken into account. The World Bank (2021) adopts an even broader approach by including produced capital, natural capital, human capital, and net foreign assets in its conception of national wealth.

Wealth may therefore be understood as a multidimensional resource. It includes not only money but also property, investments, human capabilities, natural resources, and social resources. However, the present study is primarily concerned with the material dimension of wealth, particularly those possessions that are visible and capable of communicating social meanings. In the context of the present study, wealth becomes significant because it operates at both economic and social levels. While wealth provides economic resources, its visible manifestations can also affect how individuals are perceived and treated. A person who owns expensive vehicles, houses, clothing, jewellery, or businesses may be perceived as successful, influential, or socially important. Wealth therefore becomes more than an economic condition; it becomes a resource through which social identity and status may be constructed.

Material or Physical Wealth

Material wealth refers to tangible possessions and assets that can generally be seen, possessed, used, exchanged, or assigned economic value. Such possessions include land, houses, buildings, vehicles, machinery, furniture, jewellery, clothing, livestock, and other physical commodities. The concept is important to this study because material possessions possess a high degree of visibility. Unlike certain financial assets that may remain unknown to members of the public, physical possessions are often displayed and interpreted within everyday social interaction. A vehicle, house, item of clothing, piece of jewellery, or business premises can communicate information about the economic position of its owner.

Marx (1867) demonstrates the importance of property ownership in the formation of social classes. The possession and control of material resources can distinguish individuals and groups within a society and influence their position within the social structure. From this perspective, material wealth is not simply a collection of objects; it can be related to power and social differentiation. Bourdieu (1986) further explains that economic capital can be converted into other forms of capital, particularly social and cultural capital. An individual's material resources can provide access to influential social networks, prestigious institutions, educational opportunities, and other forms of advantage. Thus, material wealth can generate consequences that extend beyond the economic sphere. The social significance of material wealth is particularly evident when possessions are used to communicate status. A luxury automobile may signify economic success; an elaborate house may communicate prosperity; expensive clothing may indicate social class; and foreign travel may be interpreted as evidence of economic mobility or sophistication. The objects themselves therefore acquire meanings that extend beyond their practical functions. This is particularly relevant to "Onye Naịjirịa," where the poet repeatedly refers to cars, clothing, accessories, buildings, money, and other visible possessions. The poet's concern is not simply that individuals possess these things but that society uses them as evidence through which individuals are evaluated. Material wealth can therefore be understood as both an economic resource and a symbolic resource. Its economic value derives from its capacity to satisfy needs, generate income, or preserve wealth, while its symbolic value derives from the meanings that society attaches to it.

Social Currency

Social currency is the central concept of this study. In its conventional sense, currency is a medium through which value is exchanged. By extension, social currency refers to resources, attributes, relationships, or symbols that enable individuals to gain recognition, acceptance, influence, prestige, and access within a social environment. Social currency does not necessarily possess a fixed or universal value. Its value depends on the social context in which it operates. A particular possession, title, relationship, educational qualification, or lifestyle may be highly valued in one social environment and less significant in another. Its social power therefore emerges from the meanings attached to it by members of the community. In relation to material wealth, social currency describes the process through which possessions acquire social value beyond their economic or practical functions. A luxury car, for example, may provide transportation, but it may simultaneously communicate wealth, sophistication, influence, or success. The social value of the car emerges from the meanings attached to the brand and the status associated with its ownership. This concept is particularly compatible with Symbolic Interactionism. Blumer (1969) argues that individuals act toward things according to the meanings those things have for them. These meanings emerge through social interaction and can subsequently be modified through interpretation. Consequently, a material possession becomes social currency when members of society attach a desirable social meaning to it. Material wealth can function as social currency in several ways. First, it can provide recognition. Individuals who display substantial wealth may receive greater attention and acknowledgement from others. Second, it can provide prestige, as expensive possessions may distinguish their owners from those with fewer resources. Third, it can

facilitate social access, since wealth may provide entry into influential networks and exclusive social spaces. Fourth, it can generate influence, particularly when economic resources are converted into political, organisational, or community power. Finally, it can contribute to identity formation, as individuals may construct their public identities around the possessions and lifestyles associated with wealth.

The poem "Onye Naịjirịa" presents several examples of this process. The questions concerning Benz and Bentley indicate that particular automobile brands operate as symbols of status. The question concerning the number of buildings an individual owns demonstrates the use of property as a marker of achievement. The reference to foreign earnings presents international economic experience as another symbol of social mobility. Similarly, the question concerning the number of people who visit or seek the individual suggests that social visibility and influence constitute additional forms of social currency. The concept therefore shifts the focus from simply asking "What does the individual possess?" to asking "What social value does society attach to what the individual possesses?" This distinction is fundamental to the present study.

Material Wealth and Social Status

Material wealth is closely connected to the construction of social status. Social status refers to the position or level of prestige that an individual occupies within a social hierarchy. Although status may derive from several sources—including occupation, education, family background, traditional titles, achievement, and leadership—material wealth increasingly functions as one of its visible indicators. Veblen's (1899) theory of conspicuous consumption provides an important explanation of this relationship. He observes that individuals may acquire and display goods not simply because they require them but because the goods demonstrate their economic capacity and social position. Consumption consequently becomes a form of social communication. Bourdieu (1986) similarly demonstrates that economic capital can be transformed into social advantages. Individuals with substantial economic resources may acquire social networks, institutional access, cultural experiences, and symbolic recognition that reinforce their social position. In the Nigerian context represented in "Onye Naịjirịa," status is communicated through several material and social symbols. The brand of a car, the size of a house, the quality of clothing, the number of businesses owned, foreign connections, and association with influential people can all contribute to perceptions of social importance. The poem therefore reveals how status may be constructed through visible symbols rather than through an objective assessment of character or contribution. An individual may receive social recognition because of what is seen rather than because of what is known about the person's moral or intellectual qualities.

Affluence

Affluence refers to a condition of considerable economic prosperity in which individuals or households possess resources substantially beyond their basic material requirements. It is generally associated with high purchasing power, economic security, discretionary consumption, and access to luxury goods and services. Frank (2018) associates' affluence with patterns of consumption that extend beyond basic needs, while Schor (2019) links

affluence to the availability of material resources that permit discretionary consumption. Piketty (2020) discusses the concentration of wealth and income as a source of substantial economic and social advantages. Affluence is particularly relevant to the present study because the poem does not merely describe the possession of necessities. It focuses on excess, quantity, quality, and display. The questions about multiple cars, expensive clothing, numerous buildings, foreign earnings, and social visibility point towards a conception of success based on abundance. The distinction between wealth and affluence is therefore important. Wealth may simply refer to the possession of valuable resources, whereas affluence suggests a level of prosperity in which resources can be used for luxury, status display, and discretionary consumption. In the social environment represented in the poem, affluence becomes valuable because it produces social recognition.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Symbolic Interactionism as its theoretical framework. The theory is particularly appropriate for examining the representation of material wealth as social currency in Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem's "Onye Naijiria" because the poem is concerned with the meanings that individuals and society attach to material possessions, social relationships, status, power, and public recognition. Rather than treating material objects merely as economic resources, Symbolic Interactionism makes it possible to examine how such objects acquire symbolic meanings and how those meanings influence human behavior and social relationships. Symbolic Interactionism developed from the pragmatist and interactionist traditions associated with scholars such as George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Herbert Blumer. Mead provided much of the philosophical foundation for the perspective, particularly through his discussions of the self, mind, language, symbols, and social interaction. Cooley contributed the concept of the "looking-glass self," which explains how individuals develop perceptions of themselves through their understanding of how others perceive them. Blumer subsequently systematized and named the perspective as Symbolic Interactionism and formulated its central propositions. The theory is based on the premise that human beings do not respond to objects, people, or situations solely according to their physical characteristics. Rather, they respond according to the meanings those objects, people, and situations possess for them. These meanings are produced and negotiated through interaction with others. Consequently, social reality is not simply predetermined; it is continuously constructed and reconstructed through human interpretation.

This proposition is particularly important to the present study. A vehicle, house, item of clothing, jewelry, or foreign trip has a practical or economic function, but its social significance depends on the meaning attached to it. A luxury vehicle, for example, may simply be a means of transportation from one location to another. However, where members of a society associate a particular automobile brand with wealth, sophistication, power, or success, the vehicle becomes a symbol of social status. The owner may consequently receive a level of respect or recognition that is unrelated to the practical function of the automobile. In this regard, material wealth can become social currency. Like conventional currency, which facilitates exchange and possesses socially recognized value, material wealth can facilitate social recognition and access. The difference is that its value is symbolic rather than merely

monetary. A luxury vehicle may provide transportation, but it can simultaneously purchase prestige; an expensive house can provide shelter, but it may also communicate success; a prestigious title may signify leadership, but it may also enhance social influence. These meanings emerge from social interaction rather than from the objects themselves.

Franz and Norwood (n.d.) explain that George Herbert Mead's conception of the self constitutes an important foundation of Symbolic Interactionism. For Mead, the self is not a static entity but a dynamic product of social interaction. He distinguishes between two complementary aspects of the self: the "I" and the "Me." The "I" represents the spontaneous and relatively unorganized response of an individual to the actions or expectations of others, while the "Me" refers to the internalized attitudes, expectations, and responses of society. Thus, an individual's understanding of the self develops partly from how he or she imagines being perceived and evaluated by others. This conception is relevant to the present study because the social value attached to material possessions can influence how individuals perceive themselves and how they seek to present themselves within society.

Blumer (1969), a former student of Mead, subsequently developed and formalized the perspective known as Symbolic Interactionism. The theory emerged from the pragmatist tradition associated with philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, as well as the intellectual tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology. Unlike structural approaches that tend to emphasize social structures and established patterns of social order, Symbolic Interactionism focuses on everyday interaction, individual interpretation, and the processes through which social reality is continuously constructed. Blumer maintains that meanings are not inherent in objects, situations, or human actions; rather, they emerge through interaction and are subject to interpretation and modification. Social reality is therefore understood as an ongoing process in which meanings are created, negotiated, reaffirmed, or altered through communication. This perspective is particularly useful to the present study because it explains how material possessions acquire social meanings and become associated with prestige, success, and social recognition.

Aksan et al. (2009) identify George Herbert Mead as one of the principal thinkers whose ideas contributed to the development of the symbolic interactionist tradition. According to them, Mead's pragmatist orientation challenges the separation of the individual from society by presenting the mind and the self as products of social interaction. Symbols play a central role in this process because they enable individuals to communicate, interpret one another's actions, and establish shared meanings. However, the meaning attached to a particular symbol is not necessarily identical for everyone; individuals may interpret the same action, object, or situation differently depending on their experiences and social contexts. Thus, social interaction involves continuous interpretation and negotiation of meaning. This principle is significant to the present study because material objects such as expensive cars, houses, clothing, jewelry, and other possessions may be interpreted as symbols of wealth and achievement by some members of society, while others may attach different meanings to them. Nickerson (2025) further describes Symbolic Interactionism as a micro-level sociological perspective concerned with the manner in which individuals construct social reality through

shared meanings and interpretations. According to this perspective, people do not respond to objects or situations solely on the basis of their physical characteristics; instead, their responses are influenced by the meanings they attach to them. Symbols may include language, gestures, objects, clothing, and culturally recognized signs. Their significance is derived from the meanings that individuals and groups collectively assign to them. Consequently, a material possession such as a luxury automobile may function as more than a means of transportation when society interprets it as a representation of affluence, prestige, or social success.

Nickerson (2025) further observes that society itself is sustained through systems of shared symbols, with language serving as one of the most important mechanisms through which these meanings are communicated and transmitted. Individuals learn the meanings attached to particular objects, behaviors, and social practices through interaction with others, and these meanings are subsequently reproduced across generations. In this sense, social reality is continually constructed through shared interpretations rather than existing as an entirely fixed or independent phenomenon.

Applied to "Onye Naịjirịa," these principles provide a useful basis for understanding how material possessions become symbols of social worth. The cars, clothing, buildings, money, titles, and other markers presented in the poem do not possess social significance merely because they are material objects. Their importance derives from the meanings that members of society attach to them. When particular brands of cars are interpreted as evidence of wealth, expensive clothing as a sign of class, or multiple buildings as proof of success, these possessions become symbolic representations of social status. The poem therefore exposes a social environment in which material wealth functions as a form of social currency, enabling individuals to gain recognition, prestige, influence, and acceptance.

Literature Review

The relationship between wealth, social status, social recognition, and human behavior has attracted considerable scholarly attention across economics, sociology, and the humanities. Existing studies demonstrate that wealth is not merely an economic resource but can also influence social relationships, patterns of inequality, identity formation, and perceptions of achievement. Similarly, studies on Igbo written poetry have examined the genre from different thematic, stylistic, cultural, and sociological perspectives. However, relatively limited attention has been paid to the ways in which material possessions are transformed into symbols of social worth and used as a form of social currency in Igbo poetry. The present study therefore draws from existing scholarship on wealth accumulation and inequality, as well as studies of Igbo poetry, to establish the relevance and originality of its examination of "Onye Naịjirịa" in Ụtara Ntị.

Modigliani (1988), in "The Role of Intergenerational Transfers and Life Cycle Saving in the Accumulation of Wealth," examines the processes through which individuals accumulate wealth over the course of their lives. The study emphasizes savings during an individual's productive years while also acknowledging the contribution of intergenerational transfers and

inheritance to wealth formation. The significance of this work to the present study lies in its demonstration that wealth is accumulated through identifiable economic and social processes rather than existing merely as an abstract measure of prosperity. Modigliani's perspective helps to establish wealth as an accumulated resource that can shape an individual's economic position. However, his emphasis is primarily economic, particularly on saving and intergenerational transfers, rather than on the symbolic meanings that society attaches to visible manifestations of wealth. The present study extends this concern by shifting attention from how wealth is accumulated to how its material manifestations are interpreted and used in determining social worth.

Similarly, Kessler and Masson (1989), in "Bequest and Wealth Accumulation: Are Some Pieces of the Puzzle Missing?", investigate the factors responsible for wealth accumulation across generations. Their study considers bequests, retirement savings, and precautionary savings as important mechanisms through which wealth is preserved and transferred. Their argument demonstrates that wealth possesses an intergenerational dimension, with economic advantages potentially being transmitted from one generation to another. This is significant because the social consequences of wealth may extend beyond the individual who possesses it. Nevertheless, while Kessler and Masson are concerned with the mechanisms of wealth accumulation and transmission, the present study is interested in the social meanings that emerge once wealth becomes visible. Thus, the present study moves from the economic reproduction of wealth to its social representation.

Keister and Moller (2000), in "Wealth Inequality in the United States," examine the distribution and ownership of wealth and the factors that contribute to differences in wealth accumulation. Their discussion identifies education, family background, inheritance, and other social and economic circumstances as factors influencing the distribution of wealth. The study is particularly important because it demonstrates that wealth is unevenly distributed and that access to economic resources is influenced by broader social conditions. Wealth inequality consequently has implications for social opportunities and social positioning. While their study concentrates on wealth inequality and its determinants, the present study considers another dimension of inequality: the tendency of society to use visible wealth as a basis for distinguishing individuals and assigning social value to them. In this sense, "Onye Naịjirịa" provides a literary representation of a society in which differences in material possession may become differences in social recognition.

Killewald, Pfeffer, and Schachner (2017), in "Wealth Inequality and Accumulation," provide a comprehensive examination of wealth accumulation and inequality. They conceptualize wealth in terms of net worth, generally understood as the value of assets after liabilities have been deducted, and examine the factors responsible for the accumulation and distribution of wealth. Their discussion includes inheritance, family background, economic resources, and the broader social consequences of unequal wealth distribution. The relevance of their work to the present study lies in its recognition that wealth has consequences beyond individual financial capacity. Differences in wealth can affect access to opportunities, security, and social

advantages. However, the study remains largely concerned with the structural and economic dimensions of wealth. The present study complements this perspective by examining the cultural and symbolic dimension of material wealth, particularly the manner in which visible possessions become indicators through which people are judged and socially ranked.

Pfeffer and Waitkus (2021), in "The Wealth Inequality of Nations," further examine variations in wealth inequality across different national contexts. Their study demonstrates that countries with comparable levels of income inequality may nevertheless exhibit substantially different patterns of wealth inequality because of variations in housing ownership, financial assets, debt, and government policies. Of particular importance is their identification of housing equity as a significant component of wealth accumulation. Their findings reinforce the idea that physical assets, particularly property, constitute an important component of economic security and social differentiation. This has relevance to the present study because the possession of houses and other landed properties is prominent in the social environment represented in "Onye Naijiṛịa." However, while Pfeffer and Waitkus examine housing primarily as an economic asset and a determinant of wealth inequality, the poem presents houses and buildings as symbols of accomplishment and social status. The present study therefore examines the symbolic dimension that economic research does not directly address. Beckert (2022), in "Durable Wealth: Institutions, Mechanisms, and Practices of Wealth Perpetuation," focuses on the ways wealthy families preserve and expand their economic resources across generations. The study demonstrates that wealth is not necessarily the result of individual effort alone but can be maintained through inheritance, investment, taxation arrangements, trusts, family businesses, and institutions that protect private property. Beckert's argument is significant because it challenges the assumption that wealth should always be understood simply as an individual's personal achievement. It draws attention to the institutional and social structures that contribute to the reproduction of economic advantage. In relation to the present study, this perspective is useful in understanding why material wealth can become a powerful social resource. When wealth is accumulated and preserved across generations, its symbolic significance may also become entrenched within communities, thereby reinforcing the association between possession, prestige, and social importance. The present study, however, is less concerned with the institutional preservation of wealth than with the social meanings attached to its visible manifestations.

Scholarship on Igbo written poetry provides another important dimension for this study. Nnyigide (2022), in "Nzipụta Mmekọrịta Mmadụ na Ekerechi n'Abụ Ederede Igbo A Họọrọ," examines selected Igbo poems with particular attention to the representation of human beings and their relationship with the natural environment. The study considers the representation of natural phenomena such as trees, the sun, moon, and rain and demonstrates their significance to human existence, particularly their economic and environmental importance. Employing ecocriticism, Nnyigide demonstrates how Igbo poetry can serve as a medium for representing relationships between people and their environment. The relevance of this study to the present research lies in its demonstration that Igbo written poetry provides a viable literary space for examining social, economic, and cultural realities. However, its focus is primarily ecological and does not examine the representation of material wealth as a basis for social valuation. The

present study extends the sociological possibilities of Igbo poetry by investigating the cultural meanings attached to material possessions.

Nwizu (2023), in "Atụmatụ Nka Dị n'Abụ Akwamozu," examines stylistic devices in Igbo dirges. The study identifies the use of literary devices such as metaphor, simile, hyperbole, alliteration, assonance, and repetition, demonstrating how these techniques contribute to the artistic quality, rhythm, and expressiveness of Igbo poetry. Although the thematic focus of Nwizu's study differs from that of the present research, it establishes the importance of examining the formal and stylistic features through which Igbo poets communicate ideas. This is relevant to "Onye Naijiria," where rhetorical questions, repetition, irony, satire, and imagery contribute to the presentation of material wealth and social expectations. While Nwizu is primarily concerned with stylistic features in dirges, the present study is concerned with the socio-cultural meaning conveyed through poetic language.

Okolo and Ude (2025), in their study "Mmetụta Agwa Ndị Nkụzi n'Ọmụmụ Abụ Ederede Igbo n'Ogo Sekọndịrị Ukwu na Zoonu Mmụta Enugu, Steeti Enugu," investigate the influence of teachers' attitudes on the teaching and learning of Igbo written poetry among senior secondary school students in Enugu State. Their findings indicate that the personal life of teachers does not necessarily diminish students' interest in learning Igbo poetry, although fear of corporal punishment and flogging may negatively affect students' engagement with the subject. The study is significant to the present research because it confirms the continuing scholarly interest in Igbo written poetry and its relationship with social and educational realities. However, its emphasis is pedagogical rather than thematic or sociological. Unlike the present study, it does not examine how Igbo poetry represents contemporary attitudes toward wealth, status, or social recognition.

Udoma (2025), in "Ntụcha Abụ Ederede Igbo Ụfọdụ A Họọrọ Dịka Enyo E Ji Ahụta Ebimndụ n'Ụwa," analyses selected poems from Ifeka Ogochukwu's Izunwanne as reflections of human existence. The study examines the ways in which the poet represents realities of life, particularly relationships between leaders and followers and other social issues that affect human existence. This work is particularly relevant because it establishes the capacity of Igbo written poetry to function as a mirror through which social realities and human experiences can be examined. Udoma's study demonstrates that Igbo poetry can transcend aesthetic considerations and engage with questions of leadership, relationships, and social organization. The present study shares this broader sociological orientation but focuses specifically on the representation of material wealth as a determinant of social recognition. While Udoma examines leadership and other dimensions of human experience, the present research investigates the social meanings attached to possessions and affluence in "Onye Naijiria.

Okeyika (2026), in "Nkewa Atụmatụokwu Maka Mkpụrụokwu na Atụmatụokwu Maka Ụdaolu: Ngosipụta Ha n'Abụ Ederede Igbo," examines selected poems from Nolue Emenanjo's Ụtara Ntị and discusses the different figures of speech employed by Igbo poets in enhancing the aesthetic qualities of their works. This study is particularly important to the present research because it focuses on the same poetic collection, Ụtara Ntị, from which

"Onye Naịjirịa" is selected. Okeyika's work demonstrates that the poems contained in the collection are amenable to systematic literary analysis, particularly from a stylistic perspective. However, her emphasis is on the classification and use of figures of speech rather than on the socio-cultural representation of material wealth. Consequently, although both studies engage with poems from Ụtara Ntị, their objectives, theoretical orientations, and analytical concerns differ significantly. The present study moves beyond stylistic classification to examine the cultural logic through which material possessions acquire symbolic value and become instruments of social recognition.

Taken together, the reviewed studies reveal several important tendencies in existing scholarship. Studies by Modigliani (1988), Kessler and Masson (1989), Keister and Moller (2000), Killewald, Pfeffer, and Schachner (2017), Pfeffer and Waitkus (2021), and Beckert (2022) demonstrate that wealth is an important economic and social resource whose accumulation, distribution, and transmission have significant consequences for individuals and communities. These studies provide an understanding of wealth from economic and structural perspectives, particularly in relation to accumulation, inheritance, inequality, property ownership, and intergenerational transmission. However, they pay comparatively limited attention to the symbolic processes through which material wealth becomes a basis for social recognition and interpersonal judgment.

Similarly, the studies of Nnyigide (2022), Nwizu (2023), Okolo and Ude (2025), Udoma (2025), and Okeyika (2026) demonstrate the versatility of Igbo written poetry as a medium for examining environmental relationships, stylistic expression, educational practices, human experiences, and linguistic structures. These studies confirm that Igbo poetry provides significant material for investigating contemporary social and cultural realities. Nevertheless, their areas of emphasis differ from the concern of the present study. Even Okeyika's engagement with Ụtara Ntị, though directly relevant to the textual corpus, concentrates on figures of speech rather than the representation of material wealth and its social consequences. The reviewed literature therefore reveals a significant gap. Existing scholarship has examined wealth as an economic resource, wealth inequality and accumulation, and Igbo poetry as a vehicle for stylistic, ecological, educational, and social expression, but there appears to be limited scholarly attention to the intersection between material wealth, symbolic meaning, and social recognition in Igbo written poetry. More specifically, the reviewed studies do not address the manner in which visible possessions such as cars, buildings, clothing, money, social connections, and titles are represented as criteria for determining social worth in "Onye Naịjirịa." The present study fills this gap by examining material wealth not merely as an indication of economic prosperity but as a form of social currency through which individuals are symbolically evaluated, ranked, recognized, and granted social status.

The study consequently situates "Onye Naịjirịa" within the broader discourse on wealth and social interaction while demonstrating the capacity of Igbo poetry to interrogate contemporary social values. Through Symbolic Interactionism, the research examines how material objects acquire meanings through social interaction and how those meanings influence perceptions of identity, prestige, power, and success. The study thus contributes to existing scholarship by

bringing economic and sociological discussions of wealth into conversation with literary analysis of Igbo poetry, while particularly highlighting the transformation of material possessions into symbols of social value. This distinction provides the basis for understanding "Onye Naịjirịa" as not merely a poem about wealth, but as a critical commentary on a society in which what one possesses can become a measure of who one is.

ANALYSIS

The poem "Onye Naịjirịa" by Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem, published in Ụtara Ntị, presents a satirical interrogation of the values through which contemporary Nigerian society evaluates individuals. Rather than celebrating material prosperity, the poem exposes a social environment in which possessions, relationships, economic capacity, influence, and visibility have become informal measures of personal worth. The title, Onye Naịjirịa ("Nigerian Citizen"), immediately establishes the poem as a commentary on a particular social identity and the behavioural expectations associated with it. Through a sequence of rhetorical questions, the poet constructs an imaginary interrogation of the Nigerian whose social importance is measured by what he or she possesses and displays.

The poem consists of three stanzas comprising sixteen lines in total. The first stanza contains five lines, the second six lines, and the third five lines. Although the poem is relatively brief, its interrogative structure enables the poet to present a catalogue of material and social expectations. Rather than making direct declarative statements about Nigerian society, the poet repeatedly asks questions about cars, clothing, accessories, relationships, buildings, kingship, money, and social visibility. This technique creates a satirical effect because the accumulation of questions gradually reveals the absurdity of using such criteria to determine an individual's worth. nThe opening stanza establishes material possession as the first currency of social recognition:

Moto ole ka ị nwere?
Ụdị leesi ole ka ị kwaara?
Akpa wonyosi gị ọ dị ole?
Kedụ maka eleganza gị?
Akpatị ole ka ha dị?

The questions may be rendered as:

"How many cars do you have?
What types of lace do you have?
How many boxes of Wonyosi do you have?
What about Eleganza?
How many boxes do you have?"

The repeated emphasis on quantity and brand is significant. The poet does not ask whether the individual has the basic necessities of life; rather, he asks how many of them the person

possesses. The concern is therefore not simply ownership but abundance. The question "Moto ole ka ị nwere?" ("How many cars do you have?") suggests that one car may no longer be sufficient as an indication of achievement. Social recognition is increasingly attached to the number and quality of possessions accumulated by an individual. The references to lace, Wonyosi, Eleganza, and other forms of clothing and fashion similarly demonstrate how material objects function as symbols of social identity. Clothing has a practical function, but within the social context represented by the poem, its value extends beyond covering the body. The type, quantity, and presumed cost of one's clothing can communicate economic status. The individual is consequently judged according to visible consumption. This reflects Blumer's proposition that people act toward objects according to the meanings those objects have acquired through social interaction. The clothes themselves do not inherently signify prestige; society gives them that meaning.

The first stanza therefore establishes the central argument of the poem: material possession has become a language through which social status is communicated. The individual speaks through the objects he or she owns. The expensive car, the fashionable clothing, the numerous accessories, and other visible commodities become symbols that tell society whether the individual is supposedly successful. This concern becomes more explicit in the opening line of the second stanza:

Ị na-agba Benzị ka ọ bụ Benlị?
"Do you drive a Benz or a Bentley?"

The poet's choice of Benz and Bentley is significant because these automobile brands are culturally associated with luxury and wealth. The question is not whether the individual owns a functional means of transportation but whether the vehicle belongs to a prestigious category. The car therefore operates as social currency. Its value is partly determined by what it communicates to observers. Within the framework of Symbolic Interactionism, the automobile becomes a symbol whose meaning is socially produced. A particular brand can generate assumptions about its owner's economic position, lifestyle, sophistication, and influence. Consequently, the person who drives a luxury vehicle may receive greater attention or respect than someone who drives an ordinary vehicle, even though both vehicles perform the same fundamental function of transportation.

The poem's emphasis on luxury automobiles also exposes the relationship between consumption and social distinction. Veblen's concept of conspicuous consumption is relevant here because the display of expensive possessions can function as a public demonstration of economic capacity. The possession becomes important not merely because of its utility but because other people can see it. In this sense, the social value of the possession depends partly on its visibility. The second stanza subsequently moves from material objects to intimate relationships:

Ndị enyi gị nwaanyị dị ole?
Ndị enyi gị nwoke ha dị ole?
Ka ọ bụ naanị otu
Ka gị na ya na-achịchị?

"How many female friends do you have?
How many male friends do you have?
Is it only one
With whom you are associated?"

The shift from possessions to relationships is important because it demonstrates that the poet's concept of social currency extends beyond physical wealth. Social recognition is also associated with the quantity and perceived desirability of one's relationships. The implication is that having multiple romantic or social associations may be interpreted as evidence of popularity, desirability, or social importance. The satire becomes particularly effective here because the poet exposes the irrationality of treating relationships as measures of achievement. A person's moral character, loyalty, emotional maturity, or capacity for meaningful relationships is displaced by the number of people with whom the person is associated. The poem therefore suggests that the social appetite for status can extend into personal relationships, encouraging individuals to treat interpersonal connections as objects of accumulation.

From the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, this section demonstrates how social meanings influence behavior. If a particular society interprets multiple relationships as evidence of status, individuals may feel pressure to cultivate such relationships in order to maintain a desired public identity. The individual is not necessarily acting solely according to personal preference but may be responding to perceived social expectations. The reference to buildings further expands the poem's catalogue of status symbols:

N'obodo ole ka ụlọ elu gị dị?
"In how many towns do you have storey buildings?"

The emphasis here is again on multiplicity. It is not enough to own a house; the socially recognized individual is expected to possess buildings in several locations. The house consequently becomes more than a place of residence. It becomes evidence of economic achievement and social mobility. The poet's use of the expression "ụlọ elu" (storey building) is also significant because it suggests a particular hierarchy of property. A larger or more elaborate building may be perceived as more prestigious than a modest dwelling. The physical structure becomes a visible representation of the owner's economic capacity.

This observation resonates with the Igbo cultural expression "akụ ruo ụlọ, a mara onye kpara ya," which conveys the idea that the arrival or manifestation of wealth in one's home makes the source of that wealth publicly recognizable. Within this cultural context, property can possess a communal dimension because personal success is often displayed through the establishment of a respectable family home, particularly in one's ancestral community. The poem, however, draws attention to the point at which this cultural value can become excessive, particularly when the number and appearance of buildings become primary criteria for social evaluation. The poem then introduces another dimension of social currency through the

question:

Eze ndị ole ka ị bụ?
"Whose king are you?"

Here, traditional title and authority become additional markers of social importance. The question suggests that material wealth alone may not be sufficient; the socially successful individual is also expected to possess influence and authority. Kingship or leadership represents symbolic power because it places an individual in a position of recognition and command. The poem's treatment of kingship is particularly significant within the Nigerian and Igbo social context, where traditional titles and associations may confer considerable prestige. The question "Eze ndị ole ka ị bụ?" can therefore be read as an ironic measure of how many communities, organizations, or groups recognize the individual as a leader. The underlying concern remains the same: what symbols of importance can the individual display? The following lines introduce a darker dimension:

Onye na ibe ya,
Ka ị na-amị ọbara?
"Whose people
Are you draining?"

The imagery of blood significantly changes the tone of the poem. Whereas the earlier questions focus on possessions and social recognition, this image raises questions about the possible human cost of wealth and power. The expression suggests exploitation, oppression, or the extraction of value from others. It introduces the possibility that behind outward displays of prosperity may lie unethical practices. This is particularly important to the central argument of the study because it challenges the assumption that visible wealth necessarily represents moral achievement. A person may possess expensive cars, buildings, titles, and other symbols of success while the source of such wealth remains questionable. The poem therefore separates material appearance from moral character.

The blood imagery can consequently be interpreted as a critique of a social order that celebrates the outcome of wealth without sufficiently interrogating its source. If society asks only, "What do you have?" rather than "How did you acquire it?", individuals may become encouraged to pursue wealth by whatever means necessary. The social currency of material wealth can consequently create an environment in which ethical considerations become secondary to visible success.

The poem further asks:

Ego ole ka ị na-eme n'obodo ndị ọcha?
"How much do you make in the white man's land?"

The reference to "obodo ndị ọcha" ("the white man's land") introduces the issue of foreign exposure and transnational wealth. In the social imagination represented by the poem, living, working, earning, or spending money abroad can function as evidence of achievement. The question is again framed in terms of quantity: how much money does the individual make?

The significance of this line extends beyond income. Foreign residence or travel can itself become symbolic capital. An individual who lives abroad may be perceived as more successful, sophisticated, or financially secure, irrespective of the actual circumstances of the person's life abroad. The poem therefore exposes how geographical location can become incorporated into the social measurement of success. This is especially relevant to contemporary Nigerian social life, where international travel, foreign residence, and displays of overseas consumption can contribute significantly to perceptions of prosperity. Social media can intensify this phenomenon by enabling individuals to publicly display foreign trips, luxury purchases, weddings, holidays, and lifestyles. What may originally be an economic experience is transformed into a symbolic performance of success. The final question of the poem is:

Mmadụ ole na-ahụ gị anya n'otu ụbọchị?
"How many people see you in a day?"

This concluding question is particularly significant because it moves from what the individual owns to how many people recognise the individual. Social visibility itself becomes a form of currency. The important person is imagined as someone whom many people seek to see, meet, consult, or associate with. The question therefore completes the poet's catalogue of social indicators. The idealized "successful" Nigerian, according to the social logic being satirized, must have expensive possessions, multiple relationships, numerous buildings, titles, money from abroad, and a large number of people seeking access to him or her.

From the perspective of Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self, social recognition influences how individuals understand their own worth. If an individual receives attention, admiration, and respect because of visible wealth and influence, such responses may reinforce the individual's perception of personal importance. Conversely, individuals who lack these socially valued symbols may experience feelings of inadequacy or social invisibility.
The poem's structure therefore reflects a progression from possession to perception. It begins by asking what the individual has, moves through relationships and property, proceeds to authority and economic power, and ends with the question of how many people recognize the individual. The progression demonstrates that material possessions are not valuable solely because of their economic usefulness. Their greater significance lies in the social recognition they can generate.

The poem also reveals the quantitative character of contemporary status competition. Nearly every major question is concerned with "how many" or "how much": how many cars, how many clothes, how many relationships, how many buildings, how much money, and how many people. This repetition is deliberate. It exposes a social mentality in which achievement is measured through accumulation. Possessing one valuable object may not be enough; social distinction increasingly requires having more than others.

This emphasis on quantity is central to the poem's satirical force. It suggests that the logic of material competition has no obvious endpoint. Once one car becomes insufficient, several

cars become necessary. Once one house becomes ordinary, multiple buildings become desirable. Once one relationship becomes inadequate as a status symbol, multiple relationships may be pursued. The individual is therefore caught in an endless cycle of accumulation and comparison. The poem can consequently be read as a critique of conspicuous materialism. It does not condemn wealth itself. Rather, it questions the transformation of wealth into the principal standard for determining human worth. There is an important distinction between possessing wealth and allowing wealth to define the value of a person. The poem's satirical questions expose the danger of confusing these two conditions.

The symbolic interactionist perspective further reveals that the social significance of material wealth is not inherent in the objects. A Bentley is simply a vehicle, a building is a structure, clothing is a form of bodily covering, and money is an economic medium. They become symbols of prestige because society collectively attaches particular meanings to them. Once these meanings become established, individuals may begin to pursue the objects in order to obtain the social benefits attached to them. This process also helps explain why material wealth can become social currency. Like currency, material possessions can facilitate access and exchange. They can purchase attention, generate admiration, open social networks, and enhance public reputation. However, unlike conventional money, their social value depends heavily on perception. A possession that is highly valued in one social environment may have little significance in another. The poem ultimately challenges this symbolic system by forcing the reader to consider what is absent from the questions. The poet does not ask: How honest are you? How compassionate are you? How responsible are you? How trustworthy are you? How have you contributed to your community? How well do you treat others? Instead, the questions focus almost entirely on external indicators.

This absence is itself meaningful. It suggests that the society being criticized has shifted attention away from character to appearance, from integrity to acquisition, and from inner worth to public display. The poem therefore raises an ethical question about the standards through which society evaluates human beings. The reference to blood is particularly useful in disrupting the assumption that wealth automatically equals goodness. It reminds the reader that the person who possesses wealth may also exploit others. Material prosperity cannot therefore serve as reliable evidence of moral integrity. Similarly, the possession of titles or social influence does not necessarily establish that an individual deserves admiration.

The poem's broader social criticism consequently lies in its exposure of the gap between appearance and reality. An individual may appear successful because of the symbols surrounding him or her, yet the underlying reality may be entirely different. Wealth may have been inherited, borrowed, fraudulently acquired, or accumulated through exploitation. Nevertheless, if society is primarily interested in the appearance of prosperity, the source of the wealth may become irrelevant.

The poem also implicitly addresses the pressure placed on younger members of society to attain visible markers of success. Where material possessions constitute social currency, individuals who lack such possessions may feel compelled to acquire them regardless of their economic capacity. Such pressure can encourage excessive borrowing, fraudulent practices, exploitative relationships, or other unethical means of acquiring wealth. The social valuation

of material success can therefore have behavioral consequences. In this regard, the poem moves beyond individual criticism to a critique of the social system that produces and rewards material display. The problem is not simply that some individuals desire expensive possessions; it is that society creates a hierarchy in which those possessions determine who receives respect, attention, and opportunities.

Ultimately, "Onye Naịjirịa" presents material wealth as a socially constructed form of currency whose value is determined by collective perception. Cars, clothing, buildings, money, titles, relationships, foreign connections, and social visibility are transformed into symbols of achievement through everyday interaction. The poem exposes the consequences of this system by demonstrating that the individual can become valued for what he or she displays rather than for what he or she represents as a human being. Through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism, therefore, the poem can be understood as a critique of the processes through which material objects acquire social meanings, social meanings become standards of evaluation, and those standards influence individual behavior and identity. The poet's repeated rhetorical questions ultimately destabilize the assumption that possession equals worth. In doing so, "Onye Naịjirịa" calls attention to the need for a broader conception of social value—one that recognizes character, integrity, responsibility, contribution, and human dignity alongside, but not beneath, material prosperity.

Findings

The study finds that material wealth functions as a form of social currency in "Onye Naịjirịa." The poem shows that individuals are often judged by visible possessions such as cars, clothing, buildings, money, titles, and social connections rather than by their character or integrity. The study also reveals that society attaches symbolic meanings to material objects. Luxury cars, expensive clothes, houses, and foreign connections become symbols of success, prestige, and influence. Through repeated social interaction, these meanings become established standards for measuring social worth.

Furthermore, the poem exposes a culture of accumulation and conspicuous consumption, where the quantity and quality of possessions determine social recognition. It also shows that the pursuit of status can extend to relationships, political or traditional titles, and social visibility. The study finds that material wealth can obscure questions of morality. The poem's reference to the exploitation of others suggests that wealth does not necessarily indicate integrity or legitimate achievement. Consequently, the pressure to appear successful may encourage unethical means of acquiring wealth.

Finally, the study establishes that "Onye Naịjirịa" is a satirical critique of a society that equates what a person possesses with who the person is. Through Symbolic Interactionism, the poem demonstrates how material objects acquire social meanings and influence the way individuals perceive and evaluate one another.

Summary

This study examined material wealth as social currency in Chukwuemeka J. Obienyem's "Onye Naịjirịa" in Ụtara Ntị, using Symbolic Interactionism as its theoretical framework. The

analysis shows that cars, clothing, buildings, money, relationships, titles, and social visibility are presented as symbols through which individuals are assessed and ranked. The study establishes that these objects do not inherently represent success; rather, society assigns them meanings through social interaction. As a result, material possession becomes a means of gaining recognition, prestige, and influence The poem, however, challenges this value system by demonstrating that wealth does not necessarily correspond with character, morality, or personal worth. It therefore calls for a broader understanding of success in which integrity, responsibility, and human values are considered alongside material prosperity. Ultimately, the study concludes that material wealth should be viewed as an aspect of achievement, not the definitive measure of an individual's worth.

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