

The Eagle of Womanhood: Dramatising the Strength of Nigerian Women in the Wake of Modern Experience

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Abstract

*Man is endowed with talent, he acquires knowledge, and skills that enable him thrive in the hostile world. The female gender is imbued with such tremendous strength that enfolds as the ages passed. Where does Nigerian drama locate the strength of Igbo women as they grapple with the challenges of modern life especially those that affect their gender? This paper “The Eagle of Womanhood” explicates the dimensions of female power in the theatre of Osita Ezenwanebe’s *Adaugo* (2011) in order to highlight another side of female power rarely dramatized on the Nigeria stage. This is done by evaluating the choices made by the female protagonist at a critical moment in her spousal relationship and their effect on her family and other characters in the play, especially the male antagonists. The aim is to refute the obnoxious view of female indolence and rebut the claim of “woe-men” ideology which associates female accomplishments with social and filial catastrophe. “The Eagle of Womanhood” is aimed at achieving gender complementarity for sustainable development of ndi Igbo and Nigeria in general. It is *Adaugo*’s unflinching effort in securing the survival of her family despite all odds that is considered the eagle of her womanhood, a womanist strength that also underscores an urgent need for change in the Igbo’s gendered conceptualization of social roles in contemporary world.*

Keywords: gender, Nigerian drama, the Igbos, Patriarchy, Feminism, African Womanism

Introduction

Osita Ezenwanebe's stage play *Adaugo (Daughter of an Eagle)* was performed in the School of Arts and Sciences Auditorium, 228 Hall-Patterson Building, Winston-Salem State University, North Carolina, United States of America, in December 5 and 6, 2011. The performance of an indigenous African play by non-indigenous artists before a foreign audience reveals some interesting differences in socio-cultural contexts that generated vibrant post-performance discourse. Osita Catherine Ezenwanebe is a Fulbright Scholar-in-Residence 2011/2012 in the Department of English and Foreign Languages, Winston-Salem State University, assigned to teaching Dramatic Arts from African perspective and developing a drama curriculum that incorporates African theatre. One of the ways she did that is to produce one of her plays, *Adaugo*. The initial obstacles at the rehearsals are the difficulties the amateur performers face in playing certain roles. While the men were eager and interested in playing African masculine roles, the women were hesitant and confused as to what to do with the African womanist role of the female protagonist, *Adaugo*. However, the concern in this paper is not to detail what happens to an African play before it gets to a foreign stage¹, that will constitute another research on its own, but to analyze the womanist method adopted both by the director and the female protagonist.

The framework for the analysis is feminist in theory and womanist in methodology. Feminist perspective on patriarchy as oppressive and a site for struggle helps to unravel the forces the female protagonist, *Adaugo*, has to grapple with to determine her self-worth and receive the accolades she deserves for her achievements. Womanist method of harmonizing and coordinating differences typifies *Adaugo's* strategy in battling with her spousal issues and aids in evaluating the overall impact of her actions especially on other characters.

¹Biodun Jeyifo used Wole Soyinka's *The Road* to give a detailed account of what happens when African literary and dramatic texts travel. See Biodun Jeyifo. "Whose Theatre, Whose Africa? Wole Soyinka's *The Road* on the Road". *Modern Drama*, 45.3 (2002): 449 – 465.

For Feminists, patriarchy is male-dominated power structure; a social system of male rules which grants power and privileges to men and thrives on women subjugation. Though some American womanists vilify Feminism for prioritizing gender issues in the struggle for women's rights, claiming, for example, that "Racism is a more urgent matter than sexism",² that can hardly be the case in most African societies to which the Igbo society belongs. In Igbo patriarchal culture, the father or the eldest male is the head of the family and lineage is traced along the male line. Men therefore occupy certain positions of power from which women are largely excluded. The infusions of white man's male supremacist ideology of female indolence of the Victorian era into African culture during the colonial period forge a vicious alliance with indigenous patriarchal culture, popularizing several myths of patriarchy that persist in Igbo culture in modern time.

They are enshrined in the culture of the people that form the Igbo man's personality, his masculinity, played out in social relationships, especially that of gender. Patriarchy is oppressive: it promotes systemic bias against women by determining how society sees and values women and her contributions in the society. Certain forms of women oppression: boy child preference, early girl marriage, wife battering, widowhood rites, female disinheritance, rape, sexual harassment, and others are the main factors militating against women's self-actualization and determination thereby enslaving them. Hudson-Weems's perspective in "Africana Womanist" (2006) is more applicable to the plight of Igbo women. She grants the fact that "The prioritization of female empowerment and gender issues may be justifiable for those women who have not been plagued by powerlessness based on ethnic differences".³ The issue of ethnicity affects both men and women in Nigeria and is more of a weapon in the hands of vicious politicians; the impoverishment of most Igbo

²Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, "Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English," in *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24.

³Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism", in *The Womanist Reader*, ed. Layli Phillips. (New York: Rutledge, 2006), 44.

women is more patriarchal than racial. Adugo's ability to identify patriarchal illusions as oppressive and set out strategies that dismantle them in the play is considered an aspect of the strength of her womanhood.

However, the feminist perspective on sexuality and family life and its separatist tendency alienate most African women artists because of their fundamental negation of African communal life. Rebecca Jo Plant's book, *Mo: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (2010), reviewed by Steven Mintz's review of in *The Journal of Social History* (2011) details how Philip Wylie's "scathing misogynist attack" on emasculating 'momism' in *Generation of Vipers* (1942) and Betty Friedan's "clarion call on women liberation from an identity defined by chores and child care" in *Feminine Mystique* (1963) triggered off "anti-maternalist" attacks that demystified maternal self-sacrifices as another form of women enslavement.⁴ These thoughts influenced feminist concept of women liberation in modern life. The new familial models offered as substitute to traditional family in the West is an enigma to Africa. The traditional family—the man, his wife or wives, children, grandparents, in-laws, nieces, nephews, uncle, aunts—is central to and the nucleus of African life and of the Igbos in particular. Brooke Wilmsen in his study of the place of the family among refugees in Australia says it is "indisputably the central element and most important aspect" of their life.⁵ The suitable approach to analyzing Adugo's strategy for liberation is therefore sought not within the feminist but the womanist module.

In *The Womanist Reader* (2006), Layli Phillips explains womanism as distinct from Feminism and other social justice ideologies. According to her, "womanism is an ethically and culturally situated perspective that does not seek to negate difference through transcending it. Rather womanism seeks to harmonize and coordinate difference so that

⁴ Steven Mintz, review of *Mo: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* by Rebecca Jo Plant, *Journal of Social History* 45.1 (Fall 2011): 274.

⁵ Brooke Wilmsen, "Family separation: The Policies, Procedures, and Consequences for Refugee Background families." *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 30.1 (2011): 44.

difference does not become irreconcilable and dissolve into violent destruction”.⁶

Womanists aim at gender complementarity where man and woman, as unique individuals, co-exist in mutual love and responsible freedom. This research favors the womanist methods of harmonizing and coordinating, balancing and healing, through assertiveness, dialogue, arbitration and mediation, among others to achieve an “organic and dynamic wholeness that functions whether the disagreement is resolved or not”.⁷ This disposition to social conflicts is what Sandoval Chela, in *The Methodology of the Oppressed* refers to as “revolutionary love”; “the transcendental-emotive state of love” capable of creating a space within an individual and a strategy by which “limiting rational-analytical logics can be dissolved to make different, paradox-superseding logics” not only possible but also active.⁸ It is a familial system of negotiation and accommodation for common good. The man is therefore not considered an outsider or a target to be hunt down or subdued since it relies on negotiation and compromise. The Feminist conception of patriarchy and the womanist method of harmonization and coordination are appropriate in analyzing the Igbo man’s patriarchal myths and the Igbo woman’s strategy for dismantling them in the theatre of *Adaugo*.

Why the Eagle?

The eagle is considered a good symbol for the conception of womanhood and the end of the womanist method in *Adaugo*. Internet sources on the bird reveal interesting facts about the eagle that support both the directorial concept of the performance and the analytical perspective of the study. “Defenders of Wild Life” highlights the complementarity of male and female Bald Eagle in these terms: “During breeding seasons, male and female work together to build a nest of sticks....Once paired, Bald Eagles remain with each other

⁶Layli Phillips, “Introduction: Womanism on its Own.” *The Womanist Reader*,xxii.

⁷*Ibid*, (xviii).

⁸Sandoval Chela. *The Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota) 142.

until one mate dies, then the surviving bird can find another mate....Both birds take turns sitting on the eggs, but the female spends most of her time in the nest...While one parent sits on the eggs, the other will hunt and collect materials for nest upkeep.⁹

From “Arkive: Images of Life on Earth”, we learn about the “acrobatic and spectacular flight display” by which the monogamous pair reinforce their union, and it includes: “ Flying to a great height, locking the talons, and cartwheeling towards the ground, only breaking off at the last moment”.¹⁰ The Bald Eagle is described as “a sign of power, freedom and strength. Many countries use different parts of the eagle as symbols of national identities, including Nigeria and the United States of America. The eagle of womanhood in this study resides in the remarkable strength of the female protagonist, Adaugo, as enshrined in her womanist method analyzed below.

The Womanist Method in the Theatre of *Adaugo*

Adaugo is a social realistic theatre that captures the relationship of the female protagonist Adaugo, played by Candace Waters, her husband, Chuma, excellently performed by Nick Gilchrist, and their four children at a moment of financial crisis. Chuma, Adaugo’s husband and man of the house, suddenly goes bankrupt when the shipload of his goods disappears on the high sea. Adaugo takes up the mantle of sustaining the large family with her meager salary as a clerical officer in a Health Ministry. Chuma’s temporary economic dependency awakens the myriad of patriarchal myths about women – domestic bound, incapable of decision-making, bottom power, feeble and fickle minded, capacity to stray and hence in need of constant surveillance – which put serious strain on their spousal relation, threatening the collapse of the family if not for Adaugo’s strategies. How did Adaugo contend with the patriarchal uprising and what are the consequent effects?

⁹ “Eagle: the Fearless Bird”. KhaoKhaoForestandWildlifePark.www.journeytothejungle.com. n.d. Accessed December 23, 2011.

¹⁰ “Bald Eagle” *Arkive: Images of Life on Earth*<http://www.arkive.org/bald-eagle/haliaeetus-leucocephalus/image-GS1085.html>. (para.2). Accessed December 23, 2011.

Adaugo's first method is a holistic view of the problem. For her, Chuma's economic bankruptcy which prevents him from providing for the family is not just his problem but that of the family and must be confronted as such. This she clearly stated when during one of Chuma's rage, beating their daughter, Ebele, daring to tell her mother that he ate more than his own share of the lunch while they were still at lesson, she says; "Mine, please calm down. Don't allow this misfortune to leave bitter foot-prints in our family. I know you will get over it; yes, we will".¹¹ From the onset Adaugo's conceptualization of the situation is communal, informed by what Layli Phillips calls "family model", a framework of thinking about relationship, not in terms of "classification and taxonomy which relies on establishing lines of demarcation that separates and differentiates", but in promoting "relations of interconnectedness and cooperation" capable of collapsing ideological lines of demarcation.¹² Adaugo looks beyond Chuma and situates herself at an angle where she displays a deeper understanding of the state of affairs, an understanding demonstrated by no other character in the play except Mr. Dike. She sees the misfortune as a challenge and the target of her struggle. Hence even when Chuma is getting really reckless with desperation, Adaugo is convinced that there are forces within and outside him which must be identified and dismantled. "I know what I am saying", she says to Helen who accuses her of making undue excuses for her husband, "Chuma and I have been together for over fifteen years now. With the quantity of smoke I see, there is fire burning somewhere; and I must find out the source of that fire, I must".¹³ Her further actions are as full of convictions as they abound in hope and this, Okonjo-Ogunyemi says, is because they are culture oriented.¹⁴

¹¹Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo* (Ibadan: Krafts Books, 2011) 32.

¹²Layli Phillips, introduction to *The Womanist Reader*, xxxiii.

¹³Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 66.

¹⁴ Evaluating the womanist novels in English, 1985 in her essay "Womanism: the Dynamics of the Contemporary of the Black Female Novel in English", Okonjo-Ogunyemi identifies optimism as one of the characteristics which distinguishes womanist novels in English from those of the Feminist.

Adaugo rises up to the challenge; takes over the financial responsibility of the family. Unlike Adaugo's broad perspective, Chuma upholds family providence as a quintessentially male area and one that is entwined with the essence of his being. On the contrary, Adaugo has broadened the gender space, seeing it as a place where anyone, male or female can perform; and hence, fits into the role and is committed to it. She cautions her husband to feed well to avoid adding ulcer to the list of "our misfortune", and when Chuma, her husband, laments about the money to feed well, she assures him, "I will continue to try my best".¹⁵ Yet neither her assurance nor provisions could assuage Chuma's anxiety because he has constricted himself within a sphere outside compromise and complementarity. Chuma's view is a hangover from a traditional, agrarian society when man relied more on his physical agility and might to fulfill such obligation. A good example is Okonkwo's prowess in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* with which he sustains his homestead unlike his father's (Unoka's) lousiness. Unoka dissipates his energy playing a flute which yields little or nothing for his family. It was believed that the privileged position of man as head of the family is consequent upon his fulfilling his social role as its provider, a role he could perform with the sheer strength of his muscle; and hence, is vilified for negligence should he fail in that irresponsibility. Ironically, there has never been a time in traditional Igbo society when the man is the sole provider for the family; rather the patriarchal society gives him all the credit. Neither Chuma nor Eddy in *Adaugo* could answer Uche's question: "Which traditional culture banned women from contributing financially to the upkeep of the family?"¹⁶ It is just that her contributions have been undervalued, robbing her accolades she deserves.

The ideology of family sustenance as an essence of manhood and the basis for his headship can no longer be sustained in modern society where livelihood is predicated by some other forces beyond physical strength; forces can make nonsense of a man's greatest effort. The reality in Nigeria today and in Igbo communities in particular is that

¹⁵Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 32.

¹⁶Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 54.

other forms of power – intellectual, political, educational, religious, legal, and racial, etc. regulate the fruit of man’s labor. The tragedy of such patriarchal ego is its persistence in modern society. For many Igbo men today love is duty and duty is the ability to provide for the family and that is for him the measure for his dignity and relevance. Hence, failure to play that role means loss of headship, erosion of love, dignity and even relevance. The angst of uselessness is at the root of Chuma’s desperate actions since he sees no other way he can be of relevance to his family and rarely believes that his wife, Adaugo, could fit into his role; it is that space or no other. Chuma and wife have different perspectives to the problem and hence adopt different methods in tackling it.

Another of Adaugo’s womanist method is the use of creative dialogue. Unlike Chuma who, still struggling with social mask, uses dialogue to assert his difference and stamp his authority as the head, Adaugo’s dialogue is less a means of asserting her individuality and difference than of building bridges of connectivity. Chuma’s dialogue is therefore aggressive since he is fighting to regain what he believes to be slipping off his grip, marked by the use of personal and possessive pronouns, aggressive interrogations, and exclamatory assertions aimed at intimidation and domination. Expressions like “Is that why you have to come back late?” “So you know you will cook soup this night and you are just coming home at this time?” “Is that supposed to be an answer to my question?” “Watch your tongue woman! Are you questioning my action?” “This is my house and I have the right to do whatever I like”; “I am your husband, the head of this family”¹⁷ and others are indications of Chuma’s harking on areas of gender demarcation to protect, in the words of Eddy his friend and associate, “The small dignity he has left”.¹⁸

Chuma’s use of language is akin to that of the three tramps in Harold Pinter’s *The Caretaker* (1960) where Mick, the owner of their dilapidated, junk-ridden apartment, feeling superior to his psychologically dislocated brother, Aston, and the homeless, old man

¹⁷Osita C. Ezenwanebe, Adaugo, 30, 31, 24, 50.

¹⁸Adaugo, 29.

Davies who has been offered accommodation in the apartment, uses aggressive interrogation to terrorize and subdue Davies as an intruder, establish his supremacy and authority over Davies and Aston and hence prevent Davies from overstepping his welcome in the apartment. Their dialogue, like Chuma's, is a strategy to cover nakedness; a ploy to keep Adaugo in subservient dependency even though in reality she has transcended it. Like Mark, in *The Caretaker*, who is afraid of losing his ownership of the apartment to their guest, Davies, Chuma sees Adaugo's family support as an encroachment to his privileged position as the head and owner of the family. "A woman's money is bait for a man's dignity", says Eddy, Chuma's traitor-friend. "Once a woman starts bringing money into the home," Eddy continues, "She begins to rank herself equal with the man".¹⁹ Chuma struggles to ensure that Adaugo's new role does not change her status, and his aggressive dialogue is aimed at achieving that. Adaugo's interest, however, is not in positions but in equity and fairness whatever the position one is believed to occupy in the family, "Neck or tail or both"²⁰ to use Chuma's words. For Chuma, their dialogue is a battle for supremacy and position; for Adaugo, it is one of social justice.

Unlike her husband, Chuma, Adaugo sees dialogue as a terrain for negotiation and compromise. She uses language as a bridge and a shield to protect herself from Chuma's onslaught. Her dialogue is mostly explanatory, marked by subtle evasions and tactical withdrawal though firm and assertive when necessary. Expressions like "No, I only asked about..."; "I'm not questioning your acts as such; I only...."; "I'm not walking out on you..."; "I only asked Uche to lend me N80, 000.00 to make up with what I have.... Where have I gone wrong?" represent Adaugo's attempts to straighten out issues and reconnect with her husband. Others like "Mine please don't shout", "Mine please calm down"; "Chuma you're looking for trouble"; "Mine, you have come again, *ibiakwa, ibiakwaozo now*"²¹ are her efforts to diffuse tension, navigate out of Chuma's linguistic time

¹⁹Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 69.

²⁰*Adaugo*, 50.

²¹*Adaugo*, 24, 48, 49, 33, 32, 49 and 56

bomb and connect to his affectionate sense of reason in order to establish a more progressive dialogue. Adaugo's efforts are not servile. They constitute the eagle of her womanhood. For George Bernard Shaw, they are acts of heroism. In *Caesar and Cleopatra* Shaw redefines heroism by representing warfare as a life-saving art. Shaw's hero, Caesar, unlike Shakespeare's, is one who fights only when it will save more lives than otherwise. At a critical moment, when Eddy's vicious lies incriminate Adaugo as a whore and erode Chuma's trust in her, Adaugo asserts her innocence and intellectual powers by bursting Chuma's supremacist ideology with the hollowness of Eddy's lies with which it is fed. She succeeded by playing back from her phone, the voice record of Eddy's amorous adventures toward her. Eddy fractured Chuma's fragile trust by falsely accusing her of infidelity, an indictment that fits Chuma's preconceived assumptions about womanhood and allows him no space for critical judgment.

Adaugo's ability to synchronize the demands of her profession, domestic chores and "winning the bread" for her family, is the most enviable strength of her womanhood. It is this singular quality that sparks off suspicion, jealousy and envy from her husband, Chuma, and his friend Eddy, instead of gratitude and praise. Chuma rarely believes his family could be sustained by his wife; and as for Eddy, a parade and a showroom of masculinity, he is convinced Adaugo would never be able to do that: "With that miserable salary of yours?"²² he asks. It is the fear of the collapse of his family more than being emasculated that distresses Chuma due to an internalized ideology of female indolence: the obnoxious belief that women are incapable of achieving great feat or height. Uche, Chuma's friend and business associate, is different. He has transcended the straight-jacketing of gender role and is free from its inhibitions as seen in his advice to Chuma on the realistic way forward: "You can rely on your wife for the time being, yes. She is there to support and complement you...no matter how small your wife's salary is, you can trust women to manage well".²³ Unfortunately, neither Chuma nor Eddy is capable of that trust because it has been eroded by the illusion of female indolence. Unlike

²²Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 38.

²³Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 54.

Uche's belief in the power of womanhood and hence lends Adaugo money to supplement her children's school fees, Eddy graciously offers her an opportunity to barter her body for his wealth, an offer Adaugo rebuffs thereby enraging Eddy. Eddy is angry not because he is rejected but because he is convinced she prefers someone else since he sees no other way through which she can surmount the herculean task before her. World Bank policy paper on Economic development (1994) proves Chuma and Eddy wrong but affirms Uche's view. Researches carried out by World Bank and Bank for Economic Development after years of trying to boost world economy by reducing poverty through the economic empowerment of men at family-cum-grass root show that money spent on women impacts directly on the family economy than that spent on men,²⁴ necessitating a change in World Bank Economic strategy in favor of women empowerment. All the characters in the play are aware that Chuma, in the words of Eddy, "has an official mistress, Lilian, and numerous unofficial ones"²⁵ and Adaugo believes his anxiety is worsened because he no longer has enough money to shower on them. Adaugo's unwavering commitment to her family is beyond the "men's" comprehension.

Instead of the accolade she deserves, all Adaugo could get from her husband, Chuma, is a distrust that inflames his masculine ego, making it even harder for her womanism to achieve its goal of "commonweal". The researcher has in an earlier paper, "Male Ego and the Crisis of Gender", identifies the theatricality of masculinity as the crisis of gender in modern society.²⁶ Eddy's accusation of Adaugo's infidelity feeds the social myth of "bottom power" that associates women's achievement with the amount of sexual gratification she

²⁴World Bank.*Enhancing Women's Participation in Economic Development: A World Bank Policy Paper.*(Washington D. C.: The World Bank/International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, July, 1994) 14--19.

²⁵Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 72,

²⁶Osita C. Ezenwanebe, "Male ego and the crisis of gender in modern African drama", Unpublished Paper read at Dapo Adelugba's International Symposium on Performance, Board Room, Faculty of Arts, University of Lagos, February 10, 2010..

gives to men and hence robs women of the accolade they deserve. This assumption is, for example, the root of sexual harassment of women in work places. Writing about contemporary Nigerian society, Nwachukwu Agbada is explicit on the issue when he writes that: “One of the odds against women in a typical Nigerian workplace is what some of their male bosses take them to be. Even when such women show evidence of some acumen, their promotion in the job place is often predicated on the amount of sexual gratification they are willing to grant their male superiors”.²⁷

Post-Performance Dialogue

At the end of the performance, the male performers, the actors, left the stage feeling psychologically fulfilled for acting out what I see as a repressed personality while the female performers, the actresses, felt relieved of an ambiguous burden that is the demand of their role. The performance generated a lot of questions for which answers were demanded. Many of the questions generated by the performance include: why were the props not scattered on the floor of the stage during the face-off between the couples? Why did Adaugo not call the police? And why did everyone in the play kept mute about Chuma’s infidelity, even Adaugo, his wife? These questions are inseparable from the social context of the play and are addressed with reference to Adaugo’s womanist method and its overall aim. Her method of harmonizing and coordinating differences is aimed at reformation and reconciliation. Unlike many white feminists who see independence and freedom from family responsibility as an agenda for women liberation, Adaugo upholds traditional familyhood as part and parcel of her personal and professional life; hence, she is committed to its reformation and not its demolition. Adaugo is convinced that, for sustainable development, it is better, though tougher; to transform traditional family from the inside than it is easier to topple from the outside. In the play, she empowers the characters to transcend the relations of domination and oppression, the limitations of otherness,

²⁷Nwachukwu Agbada, “Daughteronomy: Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Domestic Amazons and Patriarchal Assumptions in *Children of the Eagle*.” *TydskrifVirLetterkunde* 48. 1(2011): 95. Accessed December 12, 2011
DOI:1 000288233200007.

and establish more equitable relationship. All the characters in the play experience one form of healing or the other and move from ignorance to knowledge that is expected to result in a change of belief and attitude.

Adaugo is like Liza, the female protagonist in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* who through education and courageous assertion transforms the traditional family of her husband, Lejoka-Brown, whose oppressive subjugation of the others resulted in the poverty of mind which cripples the family economy. Through Liza's courageous intervention, all the characters in the play, including her husband, Lejoka-Brown, gain knowledge and skill that enrich their lives, a life that is summarized by Lejoka-Brown's statement that serves as the resolution of the conflicts: "Elizabeth I'm really very sorry for everything that has happened. I'll go back to the cocoa business. No more monkey politics for me. But first, I'll build you the clinic I promised... and we'll live in peace on the top floor".²⁸

The props need not be scattered on the floor since violence is not part of Adaugo's method. Such methods characterize some feminist plays. For example, in Tess Onwueme's *A Hen too Soon*, the female protagonist, Gladys, a teenage girl being forced to marry an old man of 60 years, Oboli, secures her freedom by pulling the old man's manhood icon, the symbol of her oppression, off her way. Similarly, Ona, the only child of Courtuma and the female protagonist of *The Broken Calabash*, ensures her future freedom by indicting her father, Courtuma, of impregnating her, an incest, an abomination of which grief kills him. While these plays are very powerfully significant in prioritizing gender and interrogating the Igbo patriarchal society especially in the context of the indomitability of African traditional culture implied in the plays of Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark and 'Zulu Sofola, to mention but a few,²⁹ they present the African man as the

²⁸ Ola Rotimi, *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) 75

²⁹Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*(1958), "Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and J.P Clark's *The Raft* are examples of Nigerian plays that dramatize the indomitability of African cultural tradition

target for destruction and transgression and defeats the communitarian spirit of the Igbos and Africa in general. Commenting on *The Broken Calabash*, Helen Chukwuma stated that “The bloody end to the conflict is hardly a desirable mode of cultural change”.³⁰In “Tess Onwueme: Dramatist in Quest of Change”, Nwachukwu Agbada condemns Ona’s revenge on her restrictive father, Courtuma, as highly devilish and counterproductive: “The falsehood robs Ona of our sympathy, while the tragedy fails to purge us of our emotions”³¹.

Womanism is not woman specific but focuses on “harmonizing and coordinating difference, ending all forms of oppression and inhumanity, and promoting well-being and commonweal for all irrespective of identity, social address origin”.³²Adaugo’s battle is not to free herself from Chuma’s relationship, but from the biases and falsehood that regulate it. She seeks change, not mere power; and freedom, not from traditional family but in traditional family. As rightly pointed out by Joyce Ladner in *Tomorrow’s Tomorrow*, “Black women do not perceive their enemy to be black men but rather the enemy is considered to be oppressive forces in [traditional family] and the larger society which subjugate black men, women, and children”³³. Though her battle for freedom starts with herself in the family, Adaugo is committed to the freedom and survival of man and woman in society. She sees his husband, Chuma, and his friend, Eddy, as symbols of patriarchal pride in need of education for reorientation and liberation. She sees them as slaves of an outmoded society who cling to it because it feeds their selfishness. African womanists see gender imbalance in patriarchal society as the root of women oppression but prefers a holistic approach to fix the problem.

³⁰ Helen Chukwuma, “Nigerian Female Author, 1970 to the Present”, *Matatu: Journal for African Culture and Society* 2.1 (1987): 23 – 42. In Awo Asiedu, 137.

³¹Nwachukwu Agbada, “Tess Onwueme: Dramatist in Quest of Change”, *World Literature Today* 01963570, 66.3 (Summer 1992): para.12. Accessed March 2, 2012, DOI: 01963570, Literary Reference Centre.

³²Layli Phillips, Introduction, *The Womanist Reader*, xxxv – xxxvi

³³ In Clenora Hudson-Weems, *The Womanist Reader*, 49.

However, Adaugo's approach has been criticized as Universalist and a gradualist approach that amounts to another form of silencing women. Patricia Hill Collins, for example, rejects what she refers to as "the codes of silence" implied in the womanist conception of gender complementarity.³⁴ In the play *Adaugo*, what Adaugo achieves with the "codes of silence" outweighs whatever the limitation therein. In the end, she is able to ridicule patriarchal assumptions by unmasking Eddy, achieves a gendered self-definition that asserts its dignity and achievement, rescues her family from intruders – economic and human thereby a general development of the children – physical, social and mental. It is a whole reformation of the triad – man, family and society.

That Adaugo does not call the police cannot be removed from the social context of the play. Adaugo is a modern African drama; character and dramatic actions are defined within the communal life of the people. Adaugo is peopled by those whose belief in African culture of family life, with all its weaknesses, is proverbial. The Igbo society represented in the play, as in many other African communities, rely more on traditional models of reconciliation. Social and especially familial conflicts are often resolved via informal arbitration and mediation geared toward healing and reconciliation. In reality, there is a limit to which the law and its enforcement agents could get involved in spousal conflicts. Except in criminal cases like murder and other related offences, disputes including wife battering and other abusive relations are resolved or settled at informal meetings. The aim of such meetings of concerned relatives and friends is not to dissolve the family but to strengthen it through strong denunciation of wrongdoing, communal mandate and fervent appeals for mutual tolerance and love. Litigation is therefore rarely a part of people's everyday life, and is therefore a rare literary method of familial conflict resolution among the Igbos and African artists in general. In plays like Utoh-Ezeajughh's *Nneora, an African Doll's House*, Salami's *Sweet Revenge* and others, the woman's reaction to intense oppression is an informal

³⁴Patricia Hills Collins "What's in a Name? Womanism, Black Feminism and Beyond", *The Womanist Reader*, 64.

separation, not a formal, legal dissolution. The female protagonist is forced to leave the family, creating a space for resolution, which in the words of Nneora can be realized only through change: “Both of us would have to be so changed...that our life together could be a real marriage”³⁵.

I believe that the change is for both man and woman. The woman’s change as Nneora conceives of it is education and economic independence, an empowerment which can guarantee her self-reliance and actualization. The change for the man is to appreciate the complementary role of her woman as an equal partner in progress with equal dignity accorded to her sacrifices. “I will no longer force myself to stay in an institution which takes everything a woman has to offer and gives nothing in return”.³⁶ The playwright manages the end of the conflict with such dexterity that while Nneora makes up her mind to walk out of traditional family leaving the possibility of reunion, what is really dramatized before the audience is the reunion of another couple, Osita Nonso and his separated wife, Linda, implying a future reunion of Nneora and Ikenna, her husband.

In *Adaugo*, the woman, Adaugo is forced to take refuge with a family friend, Mr. and Mrs. Dike who, instead of taking her to the police to report the abuse, takes her back to her family; “Darling, take her in”, Mr. Dike says to his wife, Helen, “Let her have her bath and rest, tomorrow morning, we will take them [Adaugo and her daughter, Ebele] to Chuma’s house to know what went wrong”.³⁷ What the audience witness at the end is the triumph of a traditional family transformed through an unmasking of patriarchal Illusions and falsehood; for as all the characters crowd Chuma’s door for the reconciliation meeting, they overheard Eddy feeding Chuma with malicious lies against Adaugo, forcing Adaugo to play back before everyone, the recorded voice of Eddy’s attempt to seduce her. The roar

³⁵ Tracie Chima Utoh-Ezeajugh, *Nneora, an African Doll’s House*, (Awka:Valid Publishing, 2005) 125, 126.

³⁶ *Nneora*, 120.

³⁷ Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 67.

of laughter that greet the unmasking of Eddy heals not just the characters and the audience but also the society. The traditional family still has its pride of place among the Igbos and Africans in general; hence, dramatizing its dissolution as the a panacea to spousal oppression is not common with African playwrights writing from within the continent

Conclusion

Uwandi Igbo is a gendered world. Most Igbo communities are patriarchal and social responsibility is still the traditional, marked by the binary line of male bread-winning and female birth-giving and nurture. The Igbo man, industrious, brave, adventurous and strong, is deeply committed to his role as breadwinner. “I know Chuks, he never neglects his responsibility”³⁸, says Helen, one of the female characters in *Adaugo*. For an average Igbo man, living true to his bread-winning role is a pivot of his manliness, the essence of his manhood, the subject of his power; and that which ensures his headship in the family and dignity in the society. It is the authentication of his bravery, adventure, hard work and strength. A man who fails in that regard is therefore seen as a weakling, a coward and a woman! A popular Igbo man’s prayer; *Chimekwenanwanyinyemnni* “My God forbid that a woman should feed me” summarizes the Igbo man’s perspective on the issue.

The tension in the play inheres from Chuma’s fear of emasculation. He is crushed more by the burden of masculinity than that of his financial loss. Though *Adaugo* provides for the family, Chuma could not do domestic chores despite the fact that he has the time not because he does not see the need but because he could not move beyond the illusion, the society set for his gender. When in a discussion with eddy he senses Eddy’s mischievousness, he throws off the social mask and speaks frankly;

Eddy: You would have gone like Gideon

Chuma: What happened to Gideon?

³⁸Adaugo, 21

Eddy: The banker he has as a wife has virtually turned him into a man-servant in his own house.

Chuma: (*Now less interested [in] but more critical of the tale*). How?

Eddy: Gideon now babysits, cooks, washes, sweeps and does all other kinds of women's job.

Chuma: But who says a man cannot babysit, wash, sweep, cook and stuffs like that? You said the "wife is a banker, so, that means that banking is a woman's job if we are what we do. Unless Gideon is forced to do the cooking, the babysitting and others, I do not see what's wrong with it.

Eddy: (*Starts to laugh*). There you are! Why don't you do the same for Adaugo?

Chuma: It is not done for any wife, but for the good of the family. I don't think Gideon is doing that for his wife, anyway.

Eddy: (*Laughs loudly*). Why don't you do the same for the good of your family, you.

Chuma: I am not Gideon, and my wife is not a banker.³⁹

As Eddy fails to answer Chuma's question, "Who says a man cannot babysit..."? So does Chuma fail to answer Eddy's question as to why he, Chuma, does not do the same for Adaugo or for the good of his family. They both know the answer; the society! They know they are living on illusion and falsehood, and that is the reason for Eddy's wild laughter. He knows they are just playing a game; but for how long? The social change that makes Adaugo a clerk and Gideon's wife a banker has broken the boundaries of traditional gender role differentiation and necessitates the fluidity of social responsibility. "I still cannot understand what is happening to me".⁴⁰ Chuma confesses to his wife. What is happening to him is the social myth that blurs his

³⁹Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 68—69.

⁴⁰Osita C. Ezenwanebe, *Adaugo*, 36.

vision so that he diverts his energy to feeding the pride of his manhood instead of facing reality.

Unfortunately, in modern society, the key to winning the family bread is constricted to money, the symbol of power in modern society. Money has become the tool for acquisition and sustenance of manhood, having displaced other traditional means. It is therefore conceived as an abomination, a fatal calamity, for a man not to have money. “A moneyless man is a powerless man”, says Eddy, Chuma’s traitor-friend; for “How else can he control his wife?” he asks; since “A man without money loses control of his family, especially his wife”, he affirms. Bankruptcy becomes as dreaded among men Igbo men as bareness among their women and has transformed into a fear deeply ingrained in the subconscious. Stories abound of Igbo men who throw themselves into an inferno that razed their good. Such extreme reaction is meditated by the fear of not being able to provide for his family because such people never believe their family can have a future without their sustenance. Chuma in *Adaugo* is acting out this rooted fear. An Igbo man’s concept of filial love is duty. The only meaningful way of showing love is to meet his financial obligations to wives and children. Romantic love is seen as artificial and insincere. Having lost his money, Chuma is at a loss as to how to demonstrate his love and affection to Adaugo and this disposition increases his feeling of self-worthlessness which deepens his fear of being irrelevant, driving him to despair. “Where is your strong arm of love and affection”, Adaugo asks Chuma; and the simple answer is that what he knows as love and affection perished with the ship load of his goods in the depth of the ocean. He believes he is only relevant from the top and that means having the power of the head: money.

Many women also uphold rigid social role differentiation. They believe it is not their responsibility to provide for the family, especially in such capital-intensive expenses like school fees, house rent, feeding, building family residence, family cars, etc. Even women who can afford to do these believe they are not supposed to. One wonders what the money is meant for. Some say it is for their personal upkeep while others insist it is for them and their parents’ family. Such views are outdated, a tacit endorsement of otherness and gender crisis

because it leads to a bitter battle of supremacy and position when a woman is forced by circumstances to perform the male roles as is the case of Adaugo in the play under study. I agree with the Ghanaian playwright, Efo Kodjo Mawugbe in “the androgyny of every individual”; the view that there is a feminine and masculine sides in every individual. “A man [or a woman] is not whole until he [or she] has discovered his [his or her] masculine [or feminine] side”.⁴¹ Men and women are pressured by socio-psychological forces to act masculinity or femininity and the game is really up in modern society. “Neither patriarchy nor matriarchy alone”, Oduyoye (?...) says, “can transform the relationship between men and women”.⁴²

Unfortunately, while many women like Adaugo in the play have discovered their masculine sides, many men are yet and are unwilling to either discover or play out their feminine sides and that inheres from the reality of gender discrimination and oppression which resulted in over valuing of one and under valuing of the other. There is nothing noble or ignoble about being a male or a female. Modern experience attests to the fluidity of gender role. Maleness and femaleness are just gender spaces where either can perform at any time to meet the exigencies of the time. There is nothing noble about breadwinning or ignoble about domestic work. They are service areas for common good of the family and the society. In *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Centre* (1989), Bell Hooks calls for the cooperation of men in reconstructing black masculinity so that together, “We can break the life threatening choke-hold patriarchal masculinity imposes on black men and create life sustaining visions of a reconstructed black masculinity that can provide black men ways to save their lives and the lives of their brothers and sisters in struggle”.⁴³

⁴¹ Edo Kodjo Mawugbe, in Awo Asiedu Mana, “Masculine Women, Feminist Men: Assertions and Contradictions in Mawugbe’s *In the Chest of a Woman*” *Theatre History Studies* 30 (2010): PDF 124. DOI: 07332033.

⁴² Mercy A. Oduyoye, “Daughters of Anowa: *African Women and Patriarchy* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995) 34.

⁴³ Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory: from Margin to Center*. (Boston: South End Press, 198) 113..

Both men and women are caught up in the precarious industrial capitalism of a cyber-world where technological advancements threaten man's social relationship in communitarian existence. The traditional family seems to be the number one casualty for that world as is evident in Western societies. Africans must redefine traditional family in consonance with African communal life. The current trivialization of feminist issues in Nigerian theatre cannot be the way forward. A situation where women's quest for freedom is dissolved in boisterous laughter as in Ayekoroma's *Dance on his Grave* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* or the castigation of professional women as inimical to family life as in Ahmed Yerima's *The Portrait* and *The Mirror Cracks* are unacceptable affirmations of the illusions. The Eagle of Adaugo's womanhood in the play *Adaugo* which is her ability to collapse the gender roles differentiation and perform both successfully in an all-inclusive, not separatist manner and hence secures the unity, survival and reformation of her family from economic and human threats, is a fact rarely emphasized today in Nigerian drama. Both the feminists and the womanists aim at change in gender relationship but the paper underscores the womanist method of coordination and harmonization for sustainable change in consonance with African life.

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