

## **The Contemporary Woman: Towards Freedom in A Functional Democracy in Selected Igbo Text**

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### **Abstract**

Over the years, women are made to believe that their real life start when there is a man figure in their life; probably when they get married. This idea subjected the early woman to a great deal of oppression because, to her, life has no meaning without the man figure in her life. She is not to be seen nor heard. This paper, 'The contemporary woman: towards freedom and functional democracy in selected Igbo text', therefore, looks at the struggle women had to go through to regain their freedom and be useful to themselves, family and the society at large. This study, however, tries to encourage contemporary woman not to relapse rather to be more powerful to make the society a better place for everyone. The major material for this study is the selected Igbo text and other relevant materials. It is discovered that, the woman though oppressed, never lost touch with her inner self thus; her quest for freedom and her hunger to be heard and the opportunity to contribute her quota in making the society a better place where everyone, irrespective of gender, would have equal rights and opportunities.

**Keywords: functional democracy, contemporary woman, Freedom, Igbo Literature, Nwadike's Adaeze**

### **Introduction**

Freedom is one word that appears simple yet it is a very difficult feat to attain. It is one of the many reasons nations have gone to war against one another. People have also killed one another just to attain freedom. Even children crave for it. One peculiar factor here is that the people who are killed and the ones who do the killing are all products of women. Women therefore are at the receiving end of the struggle. This paper shall U-ray the life of the contemporary woman in the society and her struggle to be free.

The study shall find out if the contemporary woman in the text is free to live her life as she should. Her challenges and expectations. It is often believed that the man shoulders all the responsibility in the home which makes him the pillar of the family. The contemporary woman does not wait around for the husband to come home and be the man of the house. She easily slides in the position perfectly. Freedom to the everyday woman is the only reliable solution to violence.

### **Freedom**

Freedom is the ability to act, talk, behave, walk and do every other thing one desires without constraints. It is the ability to decide what to do with one's life without restrictions. It may be a career, a particular life pursuit, whatever it is, there should not be any form of holding back. The Quest for freedom may take the form of a less fulfilling career though with a higher pay, to a more fulfilling career with lesser pay. All that one desires is freedom. Guillebeau (2012) puts it this way;

If you haven't freedom before, it's an exciting discovery. You wake up and wander out into the day with no obligations or expectations, you can choose your own adventure and if you don't like the morning's adventure you can choose another one in the afternoon.

The keyword here is choose. The ability to choose between two choices without having to consult anyone. This means that one is totally dependent on one's self. What is important is one's joy, happiness and satisfaction. Some people believe that before they make any meaningful choice in life, they need to consider other people in their lives either because they do not want to hurt such people or they just want to consider them. However, Aguiyi (2012) thinks otherwise. To him, freedom is liberating oneself from the turmoil caused by other people's opinions and living according to one's own principles. Aguiyi calls it liberation, which is the act of being free in its totality. I think this is the whole essence of freedom. One does not have to hinge one's life on what people would say. This is because even if one does not do as one pleases people will still talk. It is generally in the nature of man to talk. Sometimes it is hard not to have anyone to consider in deciding on a particular important issue in one's life. Even if there is no close relative to consider, it may be just friends or customers or anyone whom one may come across in life. Howes (2012) says;

As an entrepreneur for twenty years I often tell people that I work harder the most, on multiple ventures, but the fact that everything I do is my choice and mine alone has tremendous value to me. We all still answer to someone, even if it's just our customers but the freedom to do so on your own terms or decide not to answer to them if you choose, is priceless.

This goes further to show that freedom is about making choices, either good or bad choice, no matter the outcome. It should entirely be an independent decision. This decision can be a choice to be different or a deviation from the usual norm. Just like Carner (2013) puts it;

Freedom is a chance to direct your own cause in life. To consciously make the choices that lead to success or failure. Some do well with it, some not. So many say they want freedom but shy from it out of fear. They shield themselves with the structure of a conventional life. It can be a bit daunting step out of the norm.

From these explanations, it is obvious that freedom goes hand in hand with making choices independently. Choices made should entirely be up to the person making the choice. Just as Garner puts it; either the choices made lead to failure or success, it should be the idea of the person making the choices because he or she is in total control of his or her consciousness and not pressurised.

### **The Contemporary Woman**

Women, from the creation of the world have always been regarded as the weaker vessel. In the family, they are regarded as lazy people who sit at home and expect their husbands to make their

lives rosy. While they 'sit' around at home, some are abused, intimidated, molested, beaten and most often, die. When such happens, the society begins to frown at such situations, heaping all the blame on the woman, though dead, the society still blames her. Some may believe that if she had not disrespected her husband, she would not have been beaten or abused to death. While some would believe that if she had had a paying job, she would have been busy and as a result would not have time to insult her husband. The 'younger' members of the society would say that the woman should have 'left' her husband when she felt her life was in danger. All these assertions all come after the woman have died. This paper, however, will show how women, over the years, have trained themselves, rose against all odds, to become strong contemporary women. In the home front, women are the four pillars that hold the home, whether a working class or not. To this Gbowee (2015) says;

Just like women's invisible work in the household, women's work in community building and conflict resolution which has significant development implications, go

unacknowledged. Women's peace-making efforts are not a strange phenomenon; they have been happening since the outbreak of violence and war at the end of the cold war.

This gives credence to the belief that women are home builders. For instance, a young girl gets married to a very industrious young man. Takes six years to bear three children, dedicates her life to raising these children. These include the sleeplessness associated with pregnancy, labor pains, bleeding and eventual delivery. Then comes the raising of the child. All these happen only to the young girl who becomes a doctor, a nurse, a stylist, watch night, a teacher, a prayer warrior, a cook, a lawyer, handy man, laundry man and more, over night. The young man never experiences any of these, he is the young man that goes out every morning and comes back in the evening. Nothing changes for him. The Igbo man would say 'Nwa nabunye nne ya oche' which literarily means 'a child gives his mother a seat'. This does not mean the physical chair to sit down but the fact that the woman's movement is restricted because she has a child to look after. They try to avoid crisis and misunderstanding which may result to a more grievous case like war, because it is still their children who die in battlefields.

In this contemporary society, women are no longer silent. The unfavourable society women have been swimming in helped to sharpen them. They have risen to becoming presidents, vice presidents, diplomats, lecturers, engineers, pilots, astronauts and so much more. They are no longer afraid to be heard. Ariana Grande's song 'God is a woman' was released on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2018 and as of March 22, 2019, It sold a total of two million copies in the United States. On 7th December 2018, it was nominated for 2019 Grammy for 'Best Pop Solo Performance'. When asked about her song, the singer had this to say;

So they kind of represent bunch things. To me that feels like how I feel at times of being a woman who is misunderstood or constantly labelled or pinned down as one thing or another and who's constantly misunderstood... so it was just the frustration of being a woman and feeling misunderstood and not heard. And we've been screaming for decades for equality and also to be understood and feels hard to be seen also as not just a vessel for sex which we totally can be if we choose to be, also which is sick.

This totally points to the fact that the 'woman being' has totally understood her worth. She has the right to decide what she wants and how she wants it at a given time. She is no longer pinned down, dictated for and not heard; rather she is in full control. Naturally, women have innate ability to recreate themselves, rise from the dust with little or no help or rather they rely on their inner strength to succeed. Women, irrespective of her age and class in the society tend to grow thicker skin in order to adapt the tougher condition she may have found herself in. Ariana Grande was just twenty six years old at that time yet she understood the plight of women.

The contemporary women do not just strive to look out for only themselves; they put the welfare of the people in their care first. The society attaches more importance to the men folk, making them feel more important than the women. This is why once a man is able to acquire enough wealth he becomes powerful on his own, gains more respect.

The contemporary woman is no longer afraid to state her age. In fact, that is the first thing she mentions to whoever cares to listen; either to let the person know that she can be whatever she chooses to be regardless of her age or to show that 'yes I can do it too'. Even though she stays at home with no white collar job, she engages in an online business. She is soaked in the world of technology and she will never let the opportunity to become a better person slide by.

Often women grow out of shape because they are trying to keep the family safe and together even when the weight is heavily on her. They sacrifice whatever makes them happy for their family and yet most times such kind gestures go unappreciated and unnoticed. Yet they persevere. Some would have gone back to their parents' houses but they decide to stay back to look after their kids and hope the situation will one day change for good. Irrespective of how much love that is given to her, the contemporary woman makes her home happy. This is why women become stronger when they decide to rise. Their rough conditions tend to make them stronger even when all hope is lost.

### **The Contemporary Free Woman**

In Nwadike's *Adaeze*, he portrays a very strong woman in the character of Uzumma, The text solely focuses on the need to train the girl child and the recklessness of some fathers who are supposed to be the backbone of their daughters. Adaeze, the chief character and the girl child in Question was unlucky to have a drunk as a father. Even though he worked with the white people and earned salary he was always in need of money because he had too much to drink. So when it was time to train Adaeze and her two brothers, their father blatantly refused to send them to school, especially Adaeze. His reason was that a certain young girl, after being trained by her parents eloped with a man and other stories of how young girls who misbehave after their parents must have spent money training them in school. In his words, Nwadike (1998)

Aka m adighi n'akwukwo umu nwaanyi.

O bu na unu anubeghi otu ada

Onumajuru, nke a na-akpo

Ndiokwere siri gbakwuru otu

onye iberibe dika ya n'Amazu, ka

e mufechara ego ka ego n'ahu ya

ebe a na-azu ya na koleji...

O bughị naanị nke a, n'ulo oru anyi

ndi mmadu akoola etu umu

nwaanyi gara akwukwo si akpa

agwa ojoo, anaghi ha ege nti

n'okwu nd muru ha, ha na-ebute

atumatu kariri ha. (1998:3-1).

(I am not interested in girl child education. Have you not heard how Onumajuru's daughter, Ndiokwere eloped with a stupid person like her in Amazu, after thousands was spent in training her in college...Not only that, in our office, people have shared stories concerning the bad character of educated women, they do not listen to their parents, they bring extravagant ideas...)

This is merely a case of giving the dog a bad name to hang it. Bad behaviour is not only related to girls/women only, boys/men, educated or not, misbehaves too. This is just one of the characteristics of humans, misbehaving. So, hinging a child's future on mere hearsays is as good as looking that child in the eyes and telling her there is no future for her. This man, represents some men in the contemporary society

who feel if women are given the chance to get their greatest weapon, education, they will rule better. He did not just declare his distaste for girl child education, he never bothered to contribute. Nwadike puts it thus;

Ihe m na-ekwu bu na kobo m  
agaghị aba n'izu nwaanyị n'ezi na ụlọ  
a hohaa, Uzumma sị na ya ga-azụ  
nke ahụ dī ya n'aka. A kpata a tufuo,e  
jī ya aba Ọgaranya?

(What I am saying is that my money will not be used to train a Woman in this family, period. If Uzumma says she will train her, that's her business. Does one become rich by wasting what one has?)

This is typical of a man that knows his wife is very capable. This is a way of declaring that his wife should shoulder there responsibility of training their daughter in school. It is very pathetic that somebody can liken the future of his child to a wasteful venture. Women who get married to men like these are always prepared for the unknown. They are always ready and sharp at mind knowing that anything can be dumped on them at any given time. Uzumma, his wife, already made up her mind to train her daughter in school but needed to be sure her husband was clear on his stand. Nwadike says thus, 'Uzumma eburula n'uche ihe nke ọ chọrọ ime ka a ghara ịta ya ụta n'ikpeazụ na ya bu oleliri di (pg. 3) (Uzumma has already made up her mind on what to do, but she did not want to be blamed at last for not being submissive).

This is where the contemporary woman in her comes to the fore. Like earlier said, the contemporary woman, either with formal education or not, holds the family together. They do not carry their problems about rather face it with everything they've got. Uzumma knew well what training a child meant yet she took it head on. Adaeze studied up to University level and her father never put in any interest. Her mother, Uzumma took the full responsibility of seeing her through school. Nwadike summarized her efforts thus,

Site na mgbalị Uzumma  
Adaeze aburula mmadu n'ala  
Ndikp ọ. A sị na Uzumma hapuru  
etu nna ya siri kpebie, ebee ka  
Adaeze gaara anọ taa ara nsị a ọ  
na-ara?

(Out of Uzumma's doggedness Adaeze became relevant in Ndikp ọ. If Uzumma had allowed her father to have his way, what would have become of Adaeze? )

These days, women have stepped in the big shoes of life and it fits well on them. The only woman who gives reasons for not succeeding is the lazy Woman. If not, Uzumma had every reason to fold her arms and cry her eyes out because her husband has the final say. She would have gone from one family member to another complaining about her husband's weakness. She would have resorted to making life unbearable for her husband for not living up to his responsibility. None of these she did, rather she channelled her energy

in making more money to provide for the family. It is often said that women are like teabags, no one knows how much pain

they can talk until placed in hot water. The challenges of life are the hot water women are placed in all the time in life. Some are foreseen while some are not, whichever is the case, the contemporary woman is ready. She is free to choose what suits her. She is free to navigate from one unfulfilling job to a fulfilling job. She is not restricted.

Uzumma knew it was time to step up and become the father of her kids too. Nwadike Summarizes her responsibility thus, *Uzumma bu ya bu ngwuru ji ulo n'ebe ihe, oriri na ihe ya na umu ya na-asu n'ahu di*, (Uzumma is the pillar of the family when it concerns what she and her

children would eat and wear). she is a lot of things rolled into one. Nwadike went further to say of Uzumma and her husband, thus, *'Ebe O bu na Uchekukwu hapuru iru oru diru ya dika ezigbo di na ezigbo nna, Uzumma ahapughu imejuputa oru ndi ahu n'onwe ya'* pg 27 (Since Uchekukwu did not do his job as a good husband and a good father, Uzumma did those things herself).

This is the case in most homes these days. Women are too visible not to be noticed. They are everywhere. When one tries to paint a picture of a family that has a wayward father and a not-too-active mother, the image too is Scary. Children bred in such an environment do not turn out well. They often have Questionable character. This is because, as children, they lack the basic things that build them for the future. Such kids may have witnessed fights between their parents, exchange of abusive words and many nights of hunger. Such kids survived only by chance. According to Azigbo (2010:15), 'if a child lacks the ingredients and rudiments that come with being a child, it will take 80% magic and 20% grace for such a child to survive. ..No child should be allowed to grow old before becoming a child'. Some children, because of lack and recklessness of the parents, become hardened and strong-headed. The long hours and days they need to wait before they could have a decent meal toughens them. This is why some kids behave surprisingly more mature than he/she should. It is the duty of the parents to provide these needs. The contemporary woman does not wait for the husband to provide these things especially when it is obvious he could not.

The contemporary woman is not afraid to take up challenges. She is not restricted to a particular way of life or social class. She is free to navigate from one phase of life to another. For this, she is highly respected in the society.

## Conclusion

Women have fought chauvinism and won, even though not totally, but to some extent the contemporary woman is not just heard she is equally seen. She is no longer afraid to choose from the many choices life gave her. She can choose any career and pursue it without having to think 'what will they say'. In fact, the greatest gift the contemporary woman got from mankind is freedom; freedom to see and be seen, freedom to speak and be spoken to. Freedom to be herself without being under pressure. Democracy is not complete until the contemporary woman expresses herself freely.

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