

MARITAL PERCEPTION IN IGBO TRADITIONAL SOCIETY IN EARLY FEMALE-AUTHORED IGBO NOVEL, ADA MENIRU'S *NWAEZE*

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Abstract

Marriage is a sacred institution among the Igbo people. It is not simply a relationship between a man and a woman. It involves the whole family of the man and the woman, especially the kindred (*umunna*) and at times, the entire village. However, marriage in Igbo society is not an institution a person undertakes and leaves at will. Igbo frowns at a person who abandons her marriage to her parent's house. This paper examines how marriage is perceived in traditional Igbo society as depicted in early female-authored Igbo novel, Ada Meniru's *Nwaeze* (1978). The novel is selected because it exposes the reality of marriage in traditional Igbo society. The analysis of the text is anchored on Feminism ideal about marriage. The female Igbo writer, Meniru, portrays marriage in traditional Igbo society as a communal responsibility and an alliance between families. The involvement of the families of the man and that of the girl is due to the existence of extended family system in Africa. Through marriage, the husband's family extends to the wife's family and vice versa. So, divorce is rarely acceptable. Consequently, Meniru views marriage in traditional Igbo society as a string which ties women forever, but points out the importance of education in women's life. She reveals that an educated woman with a well-paid job can be fulfilled in life irrespective of marriage. Through her female protagonist, Ifeyinwa, Meniru argues that a woman who is educated and self-reliant can leave her marriage if considered unfavourable and still live a fulfilled life. This is to establish that education empowers women to rise above negative societal practices that subjugate them. But African Womanists reject the radical destruction of family life. The womanists uphold sisterhood and the use of dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation as a peaceful means to achieve a harmonious marriage. Ifeyinwa, through the help of her

girlfriend, Ebuzoaju, reconciles with her husband, Nwaeze and they marry in church.

Keywords: Marriage, Traditional Igbo society, Igbo novel, Womanism

Introduction

Marriage is a universal phenomenon. It is performed all over the world. There is nowhere in the world where humans do not marry. The idea of marriage is inseparable from that of religion. Everything about marriage in every culture is taken very seriously (Agbasiere, 2000:93), because it is an institution ordained by God through Adam and Eve. It is through marriage that procreation begins. But, some writers like Simpson (2013) argues that the purpose of marriage is not just for procreation, nor merely to enjoy the pleasures of sex as portrayed by the Christian tradition. The fact that both procreation and sexual enjoyment exist in most marriages, they do not define what it means to become “one flesh.” According to Simpson, Love is the unitive factor in marriage, and not the structure of sexual compatibility or the capacity to produce offspring. He shows that love unites man and woman which develop into marriage and they become ‘one flesh’ joined in the sacrament of love. It is from this overflowing fullness of love that the child can come as fruit, but it is not procreation that determines and establishes the value of marriage. In essence, procreation is secondary in marriage. His argument is based on the fate of the childless couple and the issue of gay marriage and same-sex marriage. He wonders whether a marriage should be dissolved because of childlessness. However, Simpson (2013) maintains that love binds marriage together irrespective of propagation. It is a fact that, gay marriage and same-sex marriage, which erupted in full force in the United States in mid-2003 (Health, 2012, p. 260) are topical issues, but they are not legalised in most societies of the world, including Igbo. The traditional Igbo society believes in procreation. They recognise marriage between a man and a woman, as ordained by God in the book of Genesis: 1v27-28, “He created them male and female, blessed them, and said, “Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth...”. Consequently, Igbo society detests childlessness in a marriage. Hence, the Igbo name ‘*Ikemefuna*’ (let not my efforts be in vain), ‘*Afamefuna*’ (let not my family name cast into oblivion), ‘*Amamefuna*’ (let not my family become extinct), ‘*Uzoeghelu*’ (the door

of the womb/family is open), ‘*Obiechina*’ (let not my clan/family become extinct) to mention but a few. Due to unfavourable treatment of barren women in Igbo society, Ndulue (1995: 59) argues that childlessness in a marriage may neither be the fault of the woman nor that of the man. It could be an act of God to test their (couple’s) faith in Him and/ or to prove to the world that He is the ultimate giver of children as testified in the Bible.

Marriage as the core of the Igbo social structure, is a highly respected institution. It makes a person complete and responsible. It accorded status, rights, obligations and responsibilities to the individuals involved. Those responsibilities are to take care of the wife and children. Though, there have been great changes in the patterns of marriage in contemporary society where cohabitation and procreation outside marriage is the order of the day, but they are rarely acceptable in Igbo society because of its attendant problems. It is very often determines the place which a newly born individual is to take in the social structure of the community to which he or she belongs; considering how frequently illegitimate children are treated exactly like legitimate ones with regard to descent, inheritance and succession. It is necessary that the union, to be recognised as a marriage should be concluded in accordance with the rules laid down by custom and law, whatever these rules may be. They may require the consent of the parties themselves or of their parents, or of the parties as well as of their parents. They may compel the man to pay a price for his bride, or the parents of the latter to provide her with a dowry. They may prescribe the performance of a particular marriage ceremony of one kind or other. And no man and woman are regarded as husband and wife unless the conditions stipulated by custom or law are complied with (Wimalasena, 2016: 170). Every society in the world visualizes marriage in different ways and each society has its own rules, regulations, custom and law guarding their marriage rite. Generally, marriage comprises of customary, traditional, religious and civil. There are also trial marriage, marriage by convenience and contract marriage depending on the situation in which the marriage is approved. Igbo society practices customary or traditional marriage, where bride price and traditional rite are compulsory; after which, the man and the woman live as husband and wife. The purpose of the study is to

examine how marriage is perceived in traditional Igbo society as depicted in early female Igbo writer, Ada Meniru's *Nwaeze* (1978).

Concept of Marriage in Traditional Igbo Society

Marriage is one of the most important institutions of human society. It has been variously defined by sociologists, anthropologists, as well as legal luminaries to capture all human societies. Girgis et al. (2011: 246) define marriage as “the union of a man and a woman who make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally (inherently) fulfilled by bearing and rearing children together”. From Girgis et al. (2011) point of view, marriage is a permanent commitment between a man and a woman. Though, they reveal bearing and training of children as integral part of marriage. Haviland et al. (2011) interpret marriage as “a socially or ritually recognised union or legal contract between spouses that establish rights and obligations between them and their children, and between them and their in-laws”. Haviland et al. (2011) in their definition of marriage, stress the existence of rights and obligations the spouses would first fulfil to each other, before fulfilling that of their children and in-laws. However, commitment between spouses is very important for a successful marriage. Ifechukwu (1997: 14) opines that in marriage, a man needs to marry a woman he loves because love demands making sacrifices for the sake of the loved one. It demands that one stays with the loved one under thick and thin. True love is not dependent on the material possessions of either of the parties; it loves one as a person. It is spiritual and psychological. This kind of love must be mutual if the marriage is to be successful in the real sense of the word. Eriksen (1995: 108 - 109) who conducted a stock-taking of the ethnographic world atlas on 863 societies observes that polygyny is practised in these societies more than polyandry. The rationale behind their marriage institution is its ability to produce and socialise children. According to Eriksen, “Comparatively speaking romantic love is rarely seen as an important precondition for a good marriage. Rather, marriage is frequently arranged by kin groups, not by the individuals concerned; if the parties happen to like each other, this may be seen as a kind of bonus” (p. 108). Eriksen further points out that, whether or not persons choose their spouses, marriage is very commonly perceived as a relationship between groups, not primarily between individuals. The ideology prevalent in ‘Western’ societies to the effect that marriage

should be built on love, which may even transcend class boundaries, is peculiar if seen in a comparative perspective. Eriksen also reveals that among the Maasai, for example, the famous cattle nomads of East Africa, marriage is chiefly a business relationship. The Maasai society marry many wives for the purpose of raising children and making the herd grow, which is similar to the type of marriage contract in traditional Igbo society before the advent of Christianity. Igbo marriage is mostly polygamous in traditional setting, because Igbo are prominently farmers, having many wives and children help them boost their farm produce. With the advent of the Christianity, the religious marriage came into being in traditional Igbo society. Consequently, the majority of Igbo practice monogamous marriage. Polyandry is rarely practiced in Igbo society.

Marriage defines womanhood, manhood, and adult status; it governs living arrangements; and it was also central in determining the division of labour and authority with the family and between the sexes. Historically, the status of wife or husband was a central element of human identity and becoming a wife or husband was one of the most important transitions in people's lives (Thornton, Axinn & Xie, 2007: 4). While explaining objects of marriage, Beri (1982) enumerates different benefits of marriage. According to Beri, marriage is the source of every domestic comfort from infancy to old age; it is necessary for the preservation and well being of human species; it awakens and develops the best feelings of human nature; it is the source of important legal rights and obligations, and in its higher forms, it has tended to raise the weaker half of human race from a state of humiliating servitude. However, the purpose of marriage is not only to preserve human species and race, but also to enhance women's dignity and reputation. Harper (1949: 11 cited in Wimalasena, 2016: 169) emphasises that one reason why marriage continues in popularity is that it is a strongly established social habit. In the usual course of events, children are born to parents who are married, they observe most of the adults around them married and grow up to view getting married as a normal thing to do. According to Harper, marriage tends to be self-perpetuating. People get used to behaving in certain ways and they tend to go on behaving that way. Hence, the Igbo language has no specific term strictly corresponding to the dictionary gloss of the word 'marriage'. Moreover, a theoretical definition of marriage in the Igbo

context does not exist (Agbasiere, 2000: 95). Agbasiere further illustrates the following as an assessment of the meaning through general expressions used to refer to the functional aspects of marriage. For example, *ime ihe ebiri onye mere*, literally, 'accomplishing what one's age-grade has attained'. A more pointed and a more popular expression is *ibu mmadu*, literally, 'becoming a human person' with distinct identity. Emphasizing these and similar expressions is the notion of coming of age; that is, achieving married status. Furthermore, Agbasiere (2000) demonstrates that Igbo society has specific terms used to identify the actual ritual of marriage from the point of view of either the man or the woman. Thus, while marriage is described as *ilu nwanyị* or *nwunye*, or *ilu di*, 'marry a wife' or 'marrying a husband', specific marriage performance from the point of view of the man is spoken of as *inwebe*, 'owing or acquiring a separate house', distinct from his parents' house. From the woman's point of view, marriage is defined as *ilakpu be di*, which means a woman 'entering cautiously into her husband's house'. The semantics of these two expressions indicate that the office of marriage is defined in terms of *be*, commonly translated as 'home' or 'houshold' in Igbo society.

Feminist Perspective

Feminist criticism, like Marxist and new historicist criticism, examine the social and cultural aspects of literary works, especially for what those works reveal about the role, position, and influence of women. Like other socially minded critics, feminist critics consider literature in relation to its social, economic, and political context, and indeed look to analyse its social, economic, and political content. However, feminist critics typically view literature as an arena to contest for power and control, since as sociological critics, feminist critics also see literature as an agent for social transformation (DiYanni, 1998, p. 1906). Feminists analyse socio-cultural role and position of women in literature because they are aware that certain socio-cultural practices subjugate and dehumanise women. Marriage is one of the socio-cultural practices which subjugate women in African society. Feminists, especially radical feminists, believe that marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women. This is because it is through the role of wife that the subjugation and dehumanisation of women is maintained. Mojekwu-Chikezei (2012: xv) opines that, in Nigeria, the woman's place has long been in the

kitchen, although in recent times, it has not ended there. This has something to do with the upbringing of both sexes. The female child is given toy dolls – to emphasize femininity, motherhood and domesticity, and the boy is given toy trains, cars and guns – to emphasize masculinity, machoness and toughness. According to Mojekwu-Chikezei, many women of course, love to be in the kitchen, even if they cannot cook. They would like to disseminate the impression that they can. And being a good cook makes a girl more desirous as a lover or wife. After all, do they not say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach? Mojekwu-Chikezei (2012: 7) also postulates that, there are socio-economic and political deprivation and stubborn adherence to certain cultural norms which have thrown many of today's women into deep private sorrow. She emphasizes that customary laws have continued to limit the rights of women in and out of marriage. They women are subjected to all forms of cultural violence, ranges from child betrothal and marriage, dowry and bride price collection, lack of belief in the importance of educating girls; and the traditional beliefs that children belong to the man who paid the dowry or bride price results in denying custody of children to women and also women's participation in the payment of her daughter's dowry. The requirement that a woman pays back the bride price paid on her to enable her obtain a divorce under the customary law perpetuates the notion that women are property to be bought or sold.

The oppression of women in marriage is criticised by feminists, especially radical feminists, who believe that sexism is at the core of patriarchy and that all social institutions reflect that sexism. The radical feminists believe that because all social institutions are so intertwined, it is virtually impossible to attack sexism in any meaningful way. Women's oppression stems from male domination, so if men are the problem, neither capitalism, nor socialism, nor any other male-dominated system will solve the problem. Radical feminists, therefore suggest for the eradication of marriage and family life. They are of the opinion that, women must create separate institutions that are women centered, the institutions that will rely on women rather than men. They agree with the cultural feminists that, the alternative path for women will be different from men. A society where the female virtues of nurturance, sharing, and intuition will dominate in a woman-identified world. Acknowledging the impossibility of removing sexism from all

institutions, radical feminists work at local levels and in their neighbourhood to develop profit and not-for-profit institutions that are operated solely by women to serve other women, such as small businesses, day care facilities, counselling centers, and safe houses for women escaping domestic violence (Duta, 2013: 26). Radical feminists reject domesticity and sexual oppression by men and decided, to take an equal responsibility in determining their future as shown in Meniru's *Nwaeze*. Ifeyinwa leaves her husband's (Nwaeze's) house without informing anybody, not even Nwaeze's parents and siblings, and vows never to return there, even when her mother persuades her to go back to her husband's house, in order to find a solution to the problem.

The abolition of family life as solution to sexist oppression by radical feminists is not supported by Womanists who see racism as more oppressive than sexism. According to Williams (1989) Womanism reflects more egalitarian relations between men and women, much less rigidity in male-female roles, and more respect for female intelligence and ingenuity than is found in bourgeois culture. The black women want togetherness and closer connection with men through love and shared struggle for survival and for productive quality of life (e.g. "wholeness") in economics, religion, politics, and education. Walker's ideology also emphasizes sisterhood by informing women to love one another "Regardless." Women's love for one another will guide against negative divisions (class hierarchy) among women which can prohibit sisterhood and also avoid the self-destruction of bearing their burden alone but to connect with other women who are concerned about women's rights and well-being. Walker also advocates against women's competition for male attention instead women should appreciate and prefer their fellow women's culture and value their emotional flexibility and strength. Walker's definition of Womanism also suggests that no genuine community building is possible when women are excluded (except when women's health is at stake). Womanists' insistence on the unity between black men and women is the fact that African world-view is predominantly family-oriented (Kolawole, 1997, p.20). African women advocate peaceful marriages, not turbulent ones. To them the family grows out of harmonious marriages that bring about the unity of all people, men, women, children and the extended family, all which feminism lacks. Black women welcome Womanism as a means to project their cultural

identity as African women. They want to belong to a society where their impact will be felt and recognized like their white counterparts. So, separation from their men was not an issue because African women believe that their struggle cannot be won without the support of their men, notwithstanding that their men are patriarchal in orientation. Consequently, Obioma Nnaemeka's *Nego-Feminism* (2004) and Akachi Ezigbo's *Snail-Sense Feminism* (2012) advocate different strategies and mechanisms African women use to negotiate around patriarchy. The womanists are aware that African women are more inclined to reach out and work with men in achieving their set goals. Nnaemeka (2010: 206) asserts that "African feminism (or feminism as I have seen it practiced in Africa) challenges through negotiations and compromise. It knows when, where, and how to negotiate with or negotiate around patriarchy in different contexts". According to Nnaemeka, "For African women, feminism is an act that evokes the dynamism and shifts of a process as opposed to the stability and reification of a construct, a framework" (p. 206). Nnaemeka suggests that, a nego-feminist should be goal-oriented, cautious, accommodating, adaptable, and open to diverse views. Ezigbo's *Snail-Sense Feminism* (2012) also supports dialogue and negotiation between men and women as a way to reconcile issues concerning both genders to enhance cooperation between them. A womanist will ensure peace and harmony in the family (not antagonism which brings about separation) by being "committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. As a womanist, Meniru's *Nwaeze* employs dialogue to negotiate around patriarchy. She shows the importance of sisterhood in the life of women.

Traditional Igbo Marriage in Meniru's *Nwaeze*

Meniru's *Nwaeze* exposes a communal system of marriage in traditional Igbo society, where parents can contract a marriage for their daughter in the absence of the man (suitor) in question. The parents and the kinsmen of both parties must be fully represented in the marriage. This is because, Igbo society believes that, inclusion of the families and their kinsmen helps to solidify marriage and makes dissolution of the marriage difficult as Meniru pointed out in her novel. *Nwaeze's* parents, on receiving a letter from *Nwaeze* in America, displays dissatisfaction because they prefer that *Nwaeze* finishes his Doctoral degree in America, comes back and marry, so that they will witness his

marriage, which they feel will accord them prestige and respect (p. 3). But, through their friends' advice on how some Nigerian men who travel abroad to study marry white women because of lack of money, too much cold, or loneliness (p. 3), Nwaeze's father starts looking for a wife for Nwaeze. He does not want Nwaeze to marry a white woman. As a result, he calls his kinsmen to look for an educated girl for Nwaeze since they will send her to meet Nwaeze in America (p. 3). Nwaeze's cousin, Okorocha, finds Ifeyinwa as a suitable wife for Nwaeze.

Ifeyinwa is shown as an educated young girl. She is one of the women who are popular in her town because of their education. She learns laundry and catering as subjects in school (p. 3). Meniru shows that women's education in the past is for domesticity and home management. Ifeyinwa teaches same in a school at Okulu town. She is very beautiful and obedient. She is tall and fair. She is always cheerful. She is a humble and respectful girl. She is presented as a girl who humbly greets anybody she sees on the way: "*O na-eji obi ume ala juchaa oha, were nwayoọ kele ekele tutu o gawa ebe o na-aga*" (p. 3). (She humbly exchanges greetings, and quietly greets people before going out). Ifeyinwa's education, beauty, humility and self-respect make Nwaeze's parents to be interested in her. This shows that women's domesticity, physical feature, character are the criteria for their marriage. After making some necessary inquiries concerning Ifeyinwa's family background, his father's personality, if they suffer from any kind of sickness and if they are a peaceful family (p. 3), Nwaeze's parents and his kindred approve the family and visit Ifeyinwa's father with kegs of palm wine: "... *e wee buru mmaị gaa n'ulo Okwuoha si na o di nwa ewu ha huru n'ulo ya, na ha biara ile ma o bu ahia*" (p. 3). (... they carried palm wine and went to Okwuoha's house and told him that they saw a kid in his house, and they came to know if it is for sale). Meniru demonstrates that women are seen as property in marriage. Girls are referred to as kids whom men want to buy. In traditional Igbo society, women are assumed not to be for sale that is why something else, like a kid, is used to represent women instead of referring to them by their names, when men come to marry them. But for the fact that the kid, which the men want to buy, is representing the person the man wants to marry, women are for sale as property. In traditional Igbo society, as in modern times, men see and

treat their wives as their property, which they buy with their money. Burn (2005: 23) argues that when people are thought of as commodities or property, they are diminished and dehumanized and do not have the power to make their own life choices. According to Burn, in many cultures, a female is property, first of her father and then of her husband. These men decide her fate and she is expected to obey. The portrayal of the female gender as property is not acceptable to womanists because it contributes to women's denigration in the society. Ifeyinwa's father welcomes his visitors; both families discuss about their children's marriage and gulp the palm wine. Ifeyinwa's father notifies them about their next visit in order to enable him inquire his daughter's opinion concerning the marriage. Meniru shows that, in Igbo society, a girl belongs to her father before marriage. When it was her time to get married, the prospective husband and his family will ask for her in marriage from her parents, especially the father. It is only when the father or the guardian agrees that marriage will be contracted. Meniru further reveals that the girls's opinion is very important in the marriage before its contract.

Ifeyinwa's father accepts Nwaeze's family after necessary investigations, sends message to them and they meet at the appointed time: "*Ha wee buru aba mmaị anọ na otu katọn beer na otu kalama mmaị aka mere, na otu ololo mmaị-ọkụ bekee were gaa ije ahụ. Ụmụnna Mgbokwere nile soro jee ije ahụ. Otutu ndị enyi ha ka ha gwakwara ka ha bịa soro ha gaa n'ihu na igwe bụ ike. O bụ site n'otu ọdịdị ha sịrị tū n'anya ka a ga-esi nye ha nsopuru....*" (p. 4). (They carried four kegs of palm-wine, one carton of beer, one bottle of wine and one bottle of schnapps and went on the journey. All Mgbokwere's kinsmen were involved in that journey. They also invited many of their friends to join in that journey because multitude is strength. It is based on the nature of their appearance that they will be valued and respected). In the same vein, Okwuoha's (Ifeyinwa's father's) family, "*ziri ozi, dị ka omenala sịrị dị, gwa ụmụnna ha nile na ndị di na-abịara Ifeyinwa. Ha gwara ndị ụlọ, gwa ndị ikwunne, gwa ndị enyi. Mmadu wee bịa nke ukwu n'ụbọchị ahụ. Ndi okei nile ndị ụlọ Okwuoha bịara....*" (p. 5). (sent a message as the custom demands, and told all their kinsmen that suitors are seeking Ifeyinwa's hand in marriage. They told their family members, told her (Ifeyinwa's) mother's people, and told friends. Many people came on that day. All the elders from

Okwuoha's family came). Meniru shows that in traditional Igbo society, marriage is an alliance between groups of families. It is not simply an affair between a man and a woman. It involves the whole family, including the kindred (*umunna*), friends and relatives, and at times, the entire village. Igbo believe that the multitude appearance of a suitor's family during the marriage give them honour and respect. This is why in Igbo traditional; the suitor's family appear in crowd. After the families' exchange of pleasantries, Okwuoha (Ifeyinwa's father) calls his wife for kola nut: "*Mgbe o wetara oji, o si di ya na oji abiala*" (p. 5). (When she brought the kola nut, she told her husband that the kola nut has arrived) and leaves. Meniru depicts the position of women during marriage. Women do not participate in the discussion of their daughter's dowry. Their duty is solely to present kola nut to their husband. This is because women are married into the family for propagation of the family lineage. Children they bore in their marriage belong to their husbands and his kinsmen. However, it is the responsibility of the girl's father and his kinsmen to perform their daughter's marriage rite according to Igbo tradition. Okwuoha obtains the kola nut from his wife and presents to his visitors, (Nwaeze's family), they bless it as Igbo tradition demands and distribute among themselves. The Igbo use kola nut to welcome their guests and either establish or reinforce their interaction rate (Uchendu, 1964: 47). Kola nut is important in Igbo marriage because it is used to pray for life, peace, procreation, prosperity and the downfall of enemies against the marriage. Okwuoha invites her daughter, Ifeyinwa, to demonstrate her acceptance of the marriage before sharing of the wine. He gives Ifeyinwa a small gourd containing palm wine. She drinks from it and then gives the rest to Nwaeze's father since Nwaeze is unavoidably absent (p. 5). In traditional Igbo society, if a girl does not perform the marital rite, the marriage process will cease because she does not accept the marriage. However, drinking of wine during a traditional marriage process indicates the girl's acceptance of the marriage and the marriage is not by coercion. Nwaeze's father and his kinsmen immediately pay Ifeyinwa's dowry and marry her to send her to Nwaeze in America.

As a result of Ifeyinwa's marriage to Nwaeze, she resigns from her teaching job and stays in Nwaeze's parents' house, waiting for her travelling. Unfortunately, Nwaeze has married a white woman, Celia

Whiteman, before his return to Nigeria. Meniru demonstrates through the relationship between Nwaeze and Celia that, love is very important in marriage, unlike the marriage in traditional Igbo society which rarely depends on love. Basden (1982: 69) observes that “Love, then, usually has no part to play in native courtship. Later a substitute for love may develop consisting of a certain amount of affection or favour bestowed by the husband upon his wife.” A woman is expected to reciprocate her husband’s care and affection with love. Ndulue (1995: 58) points out that marriage in Igbo culture is more of a business than love. According to Ndulue (1995: 58),

It is not business in the economic sense nor is it the business of flirting and love making. It is the business of “looking for the fruits of the womb” which are children. Secondly, it is the business of bringing two kindreds (*ikwu na ibe*) or families closer together. “For the Igbo, to be without children is to miss ‘immortality’ of some sort.

From the above excerpt, marriage in traditional Igbo society is the business of procreation. It is not wholly based on love, but usually on bearing and rearing of children for posterity. A woman is expected to reciprocate her husband’s care and affection with love and vice versa. Ifeyinwa is married for Nwaeze because of her good character and domesticity. She develops love for Nwaeze because of his caring attitude towards her. Nwaeze equally loves Ifeyinwa due to her care and attention towards him, despite the fact that he has married a white woman, Celia. Ifeyinwa’s caring attitude makes Nwaeze very affectionate towards her. This is evidenced in Ifeyinwa’s comments about the reason she loves Nwaeze. Ifeyinwa narrates how Nwaeze takes good care of her when he discovers that she has headache:

O cheta otu o siri wute ya (Nwaeze) mgbe o gwara ya na ahụ adighi ya, na otu o siri kpọrọ ya baa n’ụlọ ya, wepụ akpatị ya, chọọ ogwụ isi ọwụwa nye ya... sịkwa ya, ‘Ekwela ka gị rịa ọzọ, I nula? Ihu gị adighi mma igbarụ agbarụ’” (p. 11).

(She remembered how he felt sorry when she told him that she was sick, and how he took her into his

house, brought out his box and gave her paracetamol... also told her, ‘Don’t allow yourself to be sick again, do you hear? It is not good for you to be unhappy’.)

Men win women’s affection through their caring. This is because in traditional Igbo society women are not given the right to choose their life partner. They marry their parents’ choice. However, the women’s happiness in marriage and their love for the men depend on how the men care for them. Ifeyinwa develops love for Nwaeze because he cares for her well-being. Ifeyinwa takes good care of Nwaeze as her husband, notwithstanding that Nwaeze did not give Ifeyinwa the gift he shares to others. Nwaeze’s sisters, Nwanyinkwọ and Okwuoyibo, express sadness over Nwaeze’s lackadaisical attitude towards his wife, Ifeyinwa, when Nwaeze does not recognise her as his wife. They instruct Nwaeze to give Ifeyinwa her own gift as he gives them (p. 12). Nwanyinkwọ and Okwuoyibo’s intervention intensifies the belief in female bonding which is a technique used by many feminists/womanists to create a sense of camaraderie among women in the hope of reducing the agony of oppression and sabotage by men. Nwaeze’s sisters support Ifeyinwa to achieve what is due to her in her husband’s house.

Ifeyinwa later leaves Nwaeze’s house on hearing that he has married a white woman and he is not interested in their marriage. She weeps profusely when Nwaeze does not recognise her as his wife in front of his kinsmen. Ifeyinwa is embarrassed when Nwaeze asked his father whose wife she is when one of their kinsmen, Akunna, called her ‘our wife’. In Igbo tradition, a wife is not married only to her husband but to the entire man’s family and kindred. Ifeyinwa feels that Nwaeze does not love her. She returns to her room in tears to pack her belongings:

Ngwa ngwa o wee tugharịa, laba n’ụlọ ya, nọdu n’elu akpati ya chebe ụwa ya. Mgbe ahụ o nweghi ike ijigide anya mmiri. Mmiri wee si n’anya ya na-awụ pitipiti. O na-akwa akwa n’ime obi ya. The Nile gbara ya gharị” (p. 10).

(Immediately, she turned, entered his house, sat on her box and bemoaned her fate. She could not hold her tears. Tears flowed uncontrollably. She cried her heart out. She was confused).

Ifeyinwa leaves Nwaeze's house to avoid further disgrace. Her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law presume she wants to reach her parents' house and will be back very soon. They do not know that Ifeyinwa has made up her mind never to come back. Nwaeze's kinsmen is not comfortable with Nwaeze's attitude towards Ifeyinwa. They explain to Nwaeze about his marriage with Ifeyinwa, but he (Nwaeze) claims that he has married Celia because they delay in marrying a wife for him. They inform him the intricacies and complexities of marriage in traditional Igbo society: "*The nwaanyi abughị 'lee ya tututara m, o bu ihe a na-edina ala cheere echiche otutu abali. O bukwa ihe diiri otutu mmadu, n'ih na otu onye anaghị alu nwaanyi n'ala anyi*" (p. 13). (A woman is not what you would say 'see it and picked it for me, it is what demands constant serious thinking and considerations. It is also involves a lot of people, because one person solely does not marry in our society). Nwaeze callously disregards them, and rather informs them about his intention to get a job which will enable him take care of his wife, Celia, and his family (p. 13). The female novelist, Meniru, reveals that a man does not just get married in traditional Igbo society. He must have a source of income before thinking about marriage. Nwaeze does not care about his marriage with Ifeyinwa, because he has married Celia.

Ifeyinwa tells her mother about her experiences in Nwaeze's house and her unwillingness to go back to his house. She resists all the persuasion by her parents, especially her mother, to go back to her husband's (Nwaeze's) house because he has married her: "*Nne ya siri ya na o ga-alaghachi n'ih na ndi ahụ aluola ya, na nwunye ha ka o bu*" (p. 14). (Her mother told her to go back because those people have married her and she is their wife). Ifeyinwa's mother upholds the tradition of Igbo society that a woman has no right to abandon her marriage whether good or bad. Lips (2003: 10) classified this type of women like Ifeyinwa's mother as belonging to "a traditional or conservative cluster". The women who are in this cluster according to Lips are the housewives, the secretaries, the conformists, and the maternal women. Ifeyinwa's mother is a conformist and maternal, because she aligns

herself with the Igbo cultural practices in her bid to save her daughter from public disgrace. The same women who are subjected and negated by culture are the ones who uphold it. But Ifeyinwa challenges the traditional Igbo belief about female marriage. She tells her mother that only illiterate women will stay in an unwanted marriage: “*Ọ bụ ndị agughị akwukwọ, enweghị aka ọrụ nke aka ha, ga-ekwe laa n’ulọ ebe di ha nọdụ ma di ha ọ masịrị ha, ma ọ bụ na ọ masịghị ha. Ifeyinwa adighị n’otu ahụ. Ọ hughị ihe ga-eme ya agbakwuru nwoke achoghị ya site n’ihi na emeela ego n’isi ya*” (p. 14). (It is those who are not educated, and do not have a job of their own, that will agree to go back to their husbands’ house to stay whether they want their husbands or not. Ifeyinwa is not among those women. She does not see anything that will make her stay with a man who does not want her because he has paid her bride price). Ifeyinwa’s action is a radical one. She vows that Nwaeze will suffer to get her back and orders her mother to return her bride-price to Nwaeze’s family. She immediately goes back to Okulu where she teaches to resume her job without her father’s knowledge in a bid to avoid her parents’ intervention in the matter and/or an attempt to reconcile them.

Ifeyinwa’s father on hearing about her return from his wife, invites his family and kindred to interfere on the matter, but Ifeyinwa’s whereabouts is unknown. Ifeyinwa’s father’s kindred are worried and desperate to resolve the problem because in Igbo tradition it is difficult for a woman who abandons her family to remarry: “*Alụm nwanị n’ala anyị bụ ihe nwere nkọ hie nne. Nkọ a mere na nwanị ọ bụla a siri na ọ na-ala be di, anaghị enwekwa di ọzọ, ma o mechara lụọ nwoke ahụ ma ọ bụ na ọ lughị ya*” (p. 15). (Marriage in our society has too much string. The string makes it difficult for a woman who is known to have married, to remarry, whether the man takes her as his wife or not). Ifeyinwa refuses to accept marriage as a string which ties women in Igbo traditional society and feels that women who have no means of livelihood will remain in an unacceptable marriage. Meniru provides a unique dimension that challenges the Igbo belief system that marriage bonds women forever. The myth that a married woman must stay in her marriage, whether it is heaven or hell fire is challenged by Ifeyinwa who leaves Nwaeze’s house when she realises his irresponsibility. But, Ezeigbo (1990: 48) urges the female writers to create “women who challenge patriarchy not just because they have been victims of such a

system, but because they wish to assert themselves as constituting an important and indispensable half of humanity” (p. 148). To Ezeigbo, only then can feminism give the male and female readership what Heilbrun and Stimson call “the vicarious experience of renunciation and awareness” (p. 148). The portrayal of active women who are full, complete and assertive, according to Ezeigbo, “could play down on gendered conflicts and promote meaningful interrelationship between men and women” (p. 148) and ensure cultural androgyny. Ifeyinwa prefers Nwaeze to willingly desire her. Ifeyinwa’s self-confidence is a result of her economic independence. Lips (2003: 10) terms this type of women like Ifeyinwa as “the feminists, the intellectuals, and the career women”, who cannot compromise their happiness. Ifeyinwa’s educational and economic empowerment helps her to reject being subdued by tradition. Womanists support women’s empowerment and assertiveness but prefer women to dialogue and negotiate their way towards achieving liberation and not abandoning their marriage. Ifeyinwa’s action is similar to what pertains in the contemporary society where girls’ financial independence feels unperturbed about marriage and their attitude amount to manifold of divorce cases which are not encouraging.

Meniru illustrates that women are treated as children in marriage in order to prevent their assertiveness. She shows that married women in traditional Igbo society are not allowed to go out alone. Ifeyinwa leaves Nwaeze’s house without his parents’ knowledge. Nwaeze’s parents on getting information about Ifeyinwa’s whereabouts, send Okorocha (*Onyeakaebe*), a marriage witness, to bring her back to their house. Okorocha does not meet Ifeyinwa at home and he expresses surprise that Ifeyinwa leaves without any company: “*O wutere ya na o nweghi onye sooro Ifeyinwa lota ubochi ahụ o lotara n’ihi na o tosirị ka mmadụ soro ya. Nwa agboghọ o bula aka nwe anaghị apụ ije nani ya*” (p. 16). (He was not happy that nobody accompanied Ifeyinwa the day she left because it was necessary that somebody accompanied her. Any girl who is married does not go out alone). Women are seen as children who need protection. Ogbalu (n. d. : 14) reveals that a witness ‘*onyeakaebe*’ is very important in Igbo marriage. A witness ‘*onyeakaebe*’ is generally serve as liaison between the parties and even when the marriage had taken place, he settles or assists in settling any dispute between the wife and the husband or their parents and relatives.

He takes record of the expenses incurred (except entertainment items like food and drinks) on the wife so that in the event of the dissolution of the marriage they could be refunded to the husband Okoroocha does everything in his own capacity to discover Ifeyinwa's whereabouts but to know avail

Okoroocha discovers that Ifeyinwa has gone back to her school at Okulu. He travels to Okulu in search of her. Ifeyinwa zealously goes to Okulu to recall her resignation letter for the resumption of her teaching job. Her headmaster informs Okoroocha that Ifeyinwa has gone to Onitsha to meet the school manager who is in possession of her resignation letter. Okoroocha rushes to Onitsha and he is told by the manager that Ifeyinwa has gone to Enugu where she is re-posted, because her place at Okulu has been filled. On hearing about Nwaeze's marriage to Celia, Okoroocha makes up his mind to look for Ifeyinwa in Enugu. He later finds Ifeyinwa in her girlfriend's (Ebuzaaju's) house, who accommodates her. Menirus shows that, women are desperate and determine to achieve their aim when they suffer neglect and rejection. She depicts sisterhood as a means of women's struggle for survival. Women are shown as their sister's keeper. Okoroocha informs Ifeyinwa about Nwaeze's marriage to Celia. A lot of things come to Ifeyinwa's mind and she becomes restless. But Ebuzaaju encourages her and she feels relieved. Okoroocha who expect to see Ifeyinwa crying because of the news, is surprised to see her cheerful when he visits her. He starts regretting and feeling that Ifeyinwa will hate him for telling her about Nwaeze and Celia. He tries as much as possible to know Ifeyinwa's mind but he cannot because Ifeyinwa avoids any conversation relating to Nwaeze. He loves Ifeyinwa and thinks she will leave Nwaeze to marry him. But Ifeyinwa still loves Nwaeze, notwithstanding Nwaeze's marriage to Celia. She treats Okoroocha as a friend, though she later decides to forget about Nwaeze and vows never to set her eyes on him again, but she still has feelings for him. The female novelist, Meniru reveals that a marriage witness (*onyeakaebe*) who is expected to reconcile marriage relationship could actually contribute in separating the marriage out of jealousy or lust; and that women can actually be firm in their marital decision. Ebuzaaju feels Ifeyinwa's predicament. As a womanist, Ebuzaaju tries as much as possible to make Ifeyinwa happy. She takes Ifeyinwa wherever she goes in order to make her forget about Nwaeze. She introduces

Ifeyinwa to her director, Mr. Backhouse, at their office's Easter party. Ifeyinwa and Mr. Backhouse become friends. Mr. Backhouse takes them to club, cinema, playing ground and swimming pool. When Ifeyinwa discovers that Mr. Backhouse has married, she forgets about him because she vowed never to marry a man who has married. This indicates that women can actually reject polygamy.

Celia's (a white woman) return to Nwaeze's house from America raises negative reactions and uproar in Nwaeze's family. Nwaeze's parents express their sadness over Nwaeze's engagement with Celia. They refuse to accept Celia, although they welcome her very well by preparing Chicken soup for her to show that the Igbo are very hospitable to strangers. Nwaeze's father is furious with Nwaeze's attitude. He call-outs his brother, Akunna, and discloses his fear about Nwaeze's marriage with Celia because they are not aware and involve in their marriage. Akunna summons Nwaeze in his father's (Nwaeze's father) main house, (*Obi*), where Nwaeze's father is painfully pondering on the implications of Nwaeze's action, and confronts Nwaeze:

Akunna asks him, "*Nwanyị ahụ gị na ya nọ, onye ka ọ bụ?* (That woman you are living with, who is she?).

Nwaeze replies, "*Ọ bụ onye m chọrọ ịlụ*". (She is the woman I want to marry).

Akunna rebukes him, "*Tufia! ị mee arụ. Ọ bụ onye ka gị na ya soro buo mmaj nwanị? Ị hụta ebe otu onye gara okwu nwanị, ọ buru ihe oma? Ị hụta?*" (God forbid! You have committed abomination. Who escort you for her wine carry? Have you seen where only one person ask for a girl in marriage, and it is good? Have you seen?).

Nwaeze *atupughị onụ*. (Nwaeze did not answer).

Akunna tells him, "*Ị gara ịlụ nwanị nne gị amaghi, nna gị amaghi. Ị lụọ ya alụọ nwoke amaghi, nwanị amaghi. Ị kpọrọ nwunye gị bata ulọ. Ị gwaghị mmụọ, Ị gwaghị mmadu. Ọ bụ ihe oma?*" (You went to marry her, your mother did not know, your father did not know. You marry her, no man has the knowledge of it, no woman has the

knowledge of it. You brought her to the house. You did not tell anybody. Is it good?

Nwaeze replies, “*Nnaa, biko alubeghi m ya alu*”. (My father, please I have not married her).

Akunna rebukes him, “*Taa mechie onu. O bu gini ka o jiri sota gi? O bu ndi nwe gi ka ikwu okwu dijiri. Chere ihe umunna ga-ekwu. Kama cheta na o bialu ije nwe una*”. (Shut up your mouth. Why did she follow you? It is your kinsmen that will settle the matter. Wait for what they would say. But, remember that a visitor has to go). (p. 24).

Igbo society frowns at a man who marries a wife without the consent of his parents. It shows lack of respect and regards for his parents and kinsmen. Nwaeze’s father and his brother, Akunna, disregard Celia as their wife, because they are not aware of her marriage to their son. His kinsmen also attack Nwaeze when he confirms Celia as his wife:

Okwuosa rebukes him, “*Tufia! Nwa ufu. O bu onye gwara gi na i galu nwanyi na mba? Umugbogho, ha agwula n’ala nna gi?*”. (God forbid! A miscreant. Who told you that you will marry from another town? Are girls no longer in our town?).

Obi adds, “*Mba nke a abughi mba. Anyi na ha enweghi otu ahụ. Ha di ocha, juo oyi; anyi di ojii, na-ekpo oku*”. (No, this is not another town. They and us did not have the same colour of skin. They are fair and cold; we are dark and hot).

Akunna cries out, “*Ewu ataala m igu n’isi, o bu n’ulo nke m ka ihe di otu a ga-eme. nna m, anyi ga-aga na dibia ka anyi mata ihe mere ihe di otu a jiri mee na be anyi*”. (I am humiliated, is it in my house this abomination will happen. My kinsmen, we will visit an Afa priest to infer why this type of thing happened in our house). (p. 27).

Nwaeze’s father and his kinsmen are disappointed in Nwaeze for marrying a white woman, a foreign body. They reject Celia as their wife and assure Nwaeze that Celia will quit his house in due course. They make it clear to Nwaeze that they will never accept that white woman because they have married Ifeyinwa for him “... *Ifeyinwa*

bụ nwunye ha, okwu adighi ya. O buru na nwoke ozọ abia ilu Ifeyinwa, nwata nwanyi kweta onye ozọ ahụ, ha akwuọ ngo, ma o buru na ifeyinwa aju, o di. Nwa o bula o muru bu nwa Nwaeze tutu ruo mgbe o luru di ozọ” (p. 33). (... Ifeyinwa is our wife, there is no problem with it. If another man comes to marry Ifeyinwa and she agrees, they will refund her dowry, but if Ifeyinwa refuses, we will leave it at that. Any child she bears belong to Nwaeze until she marries another husband). Nwaeze’s younger brother, *Jon*, (John) also confronts Nwaeze about his relationship with Celia. He (John) assent to Akunna’s opinion that Celia is a bad woman and irresponsible because of her cohabitation with Nwaeze (p. 34). Celia observes what is going on and tries to see if she can please Nwaeze’s parents but to no avail. Nwaeze’s father and some of his kinsmen even go as far as visiting an Afa Priest in order to know why Nwaeze commits such abomination. Nwaeze’s father and his kinsmen frustrates Celia out of Nwaeze’s house. Nwaeze expresses mixed feelings when she leaves his house. He feels sorrowful after reading Celia’s emotive letter: *“Mgbe Nwaeze guchara leta ahụ, o kwara akwa nke ukwu n’ime obi ya”* (p. 34). (When Nwaeze read the letter, he cried bitterly in his heart). He immediately goes out to look for her. He is unable to locate Celia. He finds it difficult to challenge his family for sending Celia away.

Nwaeze later secures a job in Enugu. He meets Ifeyinwa by chance at Mr. Backhouse’s (Ebuzọaju’s Boss) survival party. He begs Ifeyinwa for forgiveness. Ifeyinwa frustrates all the efforts Nwaeze is making to explain his relationship with Celia. Ifeyinwa warns Nwaeze when he tries to explain: *“O buru ogwu, o gaghị erere gi. O nweghị ihe jikoro mu na gi. Eji m aka na ndi ulo anyi gwara gi na mu agaghị alu nwoke nwerela nwanyi.... Mgbe o kwuchara nke a o gbaa nnukwu osọ gbalaa”* (p. 39). (God forbid. There is nothing between two of us. I hope my parents told you I wouldn’t marry a man that has a wife.... When she finished, she quickly ran home). Meniru describes Ifeyinwa as a prestigious girl. She (Ifeyinwa) does not want to taint her image by associating with a married man, which is contrary to what obtains in the contemporary society. Ifeyinwa rejects the polygamous nature of Igbo society to avoid humiliation of being married as a second wife. This shows that, women, especially educated ones, are capable of rejecting polygamous marriage, which brings about discord, hatred, and at times, murder in the family. Meniru shows that dissolving marriage is a very

difficult task in traditional Igbo society, because of investigations and preparations involved in contracting marriage: “*Ya mere, e kwere ka a luo, a luo, anaghị ekwe ka a gbasaa. Onye o buła na-anwa ike ya ihu na di na nwunye bikoro nke oma*” (p. 40). (That it is why, if they agree to marry, and they marry, they don’t want them to divorce. Everybody will be trying his/her best to make sure the husband and wife leave in peace). Ifeyinwa informs her parents to return her dowry to Nwaeze’s family because she thinks that marriage can be dissolved at will, without knowing that it is not the Igbo tradition to simply return dowry to the girl’s husband’s family. The dowry is returned only when the girl marries another husband (p. 40). However, dowry is refundable at whatever stage the marriage fails and the woman has another husband (Ogbalu, n. d. p. 14).

Meniru also shows marriage in traditional Igbo society as very complex because before a marriage is contracted there must be series of investigations about the family background of the parties involved. This is because Igbo society frowns at marriage that ends in divorce. It is better the marriage is not contracted than dissolving the marriage after its contraction. Ifeyinwa rejects Nwaeze as her husband but his family still calls her Nwaeze’s wife because she is traditionally married to him and she cannot run away from it:

Ya mụọ nwa, o bu nwa Nwaeze, ya nwuo, o bu ndi ulo Nwaeze ha ga-akwa ya. O bu otu a ka omenala sirj dobe ya. Ihe nke a ziputara bu na nwanyi a na- alu alu bu nwunye oha mmadu. Ndi nwoke nile bu umunna di ya ga-akpo ya ‘nwunye’. Ma eleghi anya ndi nwoke nile bu ndi obodo ahụ ga-akpo ya ‘nwunye’ n’ihi na otutu n’ime ha soro baa ajuju mgbe a na-ekwu okwu nwanyi ahụ. Ha soro juo ma o bukwa nwa na-ekere ekele, ma o dikwa ike olu, ma ndi ime ulo ha na-ezu ohi, ma o bu ogbu mmadu ma o bu na ha na-adara orja ojoo. N’ihi na ha sokwa baa ajuju ijuputa ma ndi be nke nwoke ha na-alugbu nwanyi ha, ma ha bu ndi na-apu ara, ma ha bu ndi na-anwu onwu ike, ma ha bu ndi ohi, ma o bu ndi orja ojoo. N’ihi nke a, onye ndi were ka o buru nwunye ha, ma o bu ka o buru ogo ha, o naghị adi

nfe ifechapu onye ahu igba alukwaghị m adighị nfe ma-olị (p. 40).

(If she begets a child, he/she is Nwaeze's, if she dies, Nwaeze's family will bury her. This is how the tradition made it. This shows that the married woman is everybody's wife. All her husband's kinsmen will call her their 'wife'. If care is not taken all, the men in that town will call her their 'wife', because many of them participated in her marriage investigation. They were involved in asking if she greets and receives people, industrious, if her family steals, poisons people or suffer strange sickness; because they also investigate if the man's family maltreats their wives, becomes mad, die suddenly, steals, or suffers strange illness. Because of this, any person the family accepts to be their wife, or their in-law, it is not easy to allow them to divorce).

Meniru shows that elaborate investigation is very important in marriage in order to avoid embarrassment in the future. The family of the man and the prospective wife should carry out investigation concerning both families before the contraction of the said marriage to guide against divorce.

Nwaeze goes to the extent of using Ifeyinwa's friend, Ebuzọaju, to win her back. He arranges a date to meet Ebuzọaju at the cinema house at Asata, Enugu, with the hope that Ebuzọaju will come with Ifeyinwa. But Ifeyinwa refuses to go with Ebuzọaju and goes to visit a friend. When Ebuzọaju is leaving, she meets Okoroča on the way and Okoroča decides to follow her since Ifeyinwa is not at home. Nwaeze is surprised when he sees Okoroča. Through Okoroča and Nwaeze's discussion, Ebuzọaju realises that Nwaeze is the man Ifeyinwa talks about. Nwaeze explains to Ebuzọaju about his relationship with Celia and how she left. After washing film at the cinema, Nwaeze takes Ebuzọaju to her house and uses the opportunity to know where Ifeyinwa stays. Ebuzọaju informs Ifeyinwa about Nwaeze's separation with Celia and encourages her to accept Nwaeze back. When Ifeyinwa and Ebuzọaju travel home for the yam festival, Okoroča wants to use

the opportunity to reconcile Nwaeze and Ifeyinwa's marriage. He explains to his kinsmen about Nwaeze's separation with Celia. His information calms their fears about Nwaeze's marriage with Celia. They suggest bringing Ifeyinwa back, but Nwaeze rejects their assistance and wants to handle it himself. One of his kinsmen, Akunwata, reminds him that marriage in Igbo society is a communal responsibility (p. 45). But, Nwaeze still insists that he does not need their intervention in his marriage reconciliation. Nwaeze studies abroad and does know about Igbo tradition. He is unable to imagine his father's brother's thought that Ifeyinwa divorces him. He is confused. He later accepts his kinsmen's decision to visit Ifeyinwa's house. They visit Ifeyinwa's parents and both families reconcile their children's marriage through dialogue and negotiation. But, before Ifeyinwa agrees to marry Nwaeze, her mother makes sure that Nwaeze has really separated from Celia before she allows Ifeyinwa to marry him. She also tests Nwaeze's love for Ifeyinwa before she gives her consent:

Ifeyinwa akọchaalara nne ya ihe Ebuzọaju kọrọ ya maka Nwaeze na nwanyị bekee. Ọ dị nne Ifeyinwa mkpa nke ukwu ịghọta na nwanyị ahụ abughị nwunye Nwaeze. Ọ dịkwa ya mkpa ịghọta na Nwaeze chọrọ Ifeyinwa chọsịe ya ike ya na ịmata ma Nwaeze ọ makwara na ihe o mere site n'ileli nwanyị ya nke bụ na ọ dịghị ihe o jiri lọta bụ nke ọ zụtara nwunye ya adighị mma. Nke kacha nke ọ chọrọ ịmata otu nwanyị ahụ na Nwaeze siri dị ugbu a (p. 47).

(Ifeyinwa had told her mother what Ebuzọaju told her about Nwaeze and the white woman. Ifeyinwa's mother needed to know that the woman is not Nwaeze's wife. She also needed to understand that Nwaeze wanted Ifeyinwa so much, and to know if Nwaeze understood the implications of coming back without buying things for his wife. Above all, she needed to know the situation of things between Nwaeze and that woman).

The intention of Ifeyinwa's mother is to protect and secure her daughter's happiness in her marriage. Nwaeze assures Ifeyinwa's

family that he has no relationship with Celia because she has married and promises them to love and treat Ifeyinwa as his wife. Ifeyinwa accepts to marry him. Men are shown to be patient when they are determined to achieve their aim. Nwaeze performs all the traditional marriage rites as regards his marriage with Ifeyinwa and takes Ifeyinwa to Enugu and they later wed in church.

Conclusion

Ada Meniru's *Nwaeze* portrays the life and activities of male and female genders as it concerns marriage in Igbo traditional society. The position of the male and female genders in patriarchal Igbo traditional society, as it relates to education and family activities, described in the novel is that of master-servant relation. Nwaeze is socialised for leadership and authority, while Ifeyinwa is for marriage and family life, and rarely shows concern about her ambition and fulfillment in life. This is because women who are professional in house chores and home management is sourced for marriage. Hence, Ifeyinwa's education is to prepare her for motherhood and domesticity. Marriage is shown as a communal responsibility, rather than between two individuals, in Igbo traditional society. As a result of its communality, divorce is traditionally considered socially unacceptable in Igboland no matter the situation, except if the families are not involved in the marriage. Ifeyinwa tells her mother about her unwillingness to go back to her husband's (Nwaeze's) house, after narrating her ugly experiences she has encountered in Nwaeze's house. Her parents, especially her mother, persuade her to go back to her husband's house because he has married her. Igbo society believe that once a woman is married, even if she is divorced, it will be hard for any other man to ask for her hand in marriage. Meniru depicts marriage in Igbo traditional society as a string that ties women forever and points out the importance of education in women's life. She reveals that an educated woman with a well-paid job can be fulfilled in life irrespective of marriage. Meniru argues that a woman who is educated and self-reliant can leave her marriage if considered unfavourable and still live a fulfilled life. Ifeyinwa's education and self-reliant encouraged her to leave Nwaeze's house and goes back to her teaching job. She vows that Nwaeze will suffer before getting her back to his life. This is to establish that education empowers women to rise above negative socio-cultural practices that subjugate them. Feminists, especially radical feminists, criticised the oppression of

women in marriage and family life. The radical feminists believe that marriage is sexist. Since patriarchy cannot be overthrown because men dominate every facets of life, the radical feminists propose for the abolition of marriage institution. But, African feminists/womanists reject the eradication of marriage advocated by radical feminist, and rather urge African women to employ dialogue, negotiation and reconciliation in their dealings with men, in order to achieve a harmonious marriage. The womanists uphold sisterhood among women. Ifeyinwa later reconciles with her husband, Nwaeze, through the help of her girlfriend, Ebuzoaju. Ifeyinwa's family accepts Nwaeze back as their son-in-law after necessary considerations and dialogue with Nwaeze's family and they marry in church. African women should emulate our fore-mothers who challenge patriarchy through negotiations and compromise, rather than antagonism and confrontation, for the peace and hamonious family life.

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