

## Review Article

## Neglected Gender Roles: Discourse on Efuru in Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Nne Mmanwu Uche Ezeoke of Amichi/Ndikeleonwu

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**Abstract:** It is becoming apparent that an undiluted feminist concept has been accepted as a fit-all idea for all societies. The thought runs contrary to realities in some African cultures, where the belief goes that women are left out in the political structures of those societies. There have been residues of Igbo traditional ways in the present time. Interestingly, many of the roles are prominent but have gone unnoticed and hardly any reference to these practices. The discourse has been attended to by a notable writer like Flora Nwapa, but the awareness of such possibility has been vague. It throws up the ideas like radical feminism as a subsisting feminist tool to account for such ideas. The level of female involvement in communal affairs in Igbo land is not moderate but profound. There are women husbands, sometimes widows, who marry fellow women to bear children for their deceased or living husbands to be made pregnant by a male in the community, for offspring who belong exclusively for the deceased. Many such female roles can be identified. Of course, there is the remarkable umu ada or females born into the kindreds but belong now to other communities as a result of marriage. The umu ada can summon any female or male in the community to its court. Curiously, the discussion that has not been on the table is the one on the Omu and Nne Mmanwu, two highly regarded offices in Igbo land. The masquerade is a purely male vocation, yet there are numerous instances where women head collections of masquerades from various clans. This research examines this phenomenon, ... the nne mmanwu of Amichi and Ndikeleonwu.

**Keywords:** Nne Mmanwu, Colonialism, Post- Colonialism, Gender, Feminism, Womanism.

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### INTRODUCTION

The gender topic is as old as mankind and not as new as it is being perceived; The likes of Mary Wollstonecraft, in the late 18th century were known for championing equal rights for the genders. Wolfstoncraft was one of the pioneers of the feminist activism. Gender studies throws up various perspectives on relationships. Obviously, there are unresolved issues like identity crisis according to sexes. We also ponder about the way we are in our physical compositions. As we deliberate on the world we live in, we are confronted with some questions. The question is asked, what type of society do we live in? What sort of social engineering take place in our communities? Are our interactions static or fluid? Have there been shifts in the way our society functions? What have we been observing about our culture, especially in a globalized world? These developments bring us nearer to the contentious issues of gender differences and

similarities. We are therefore compelled to view the foregoing through the lens of feminism.

Clearly, gender studies seek to find out how we think about ourselves as man/woman or others in our places of work or residence, and at certain periods. It deals with the roles of females and males in the society, and how they mold the society. It also covers a wide area among numerous disciplines like anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, political science, literature, etc. Gender studies examine the fall outs from the interactions of men and women, and how these fallouts affect society either negatively or positively. Elevation of one gender over the other gives rise to inequality. One of its core areas is how inequalities among men and women are used to oppress the other gender. This can be observed in the allocation of resources and tasks. It is argued that the issue of gender

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must be considered in building any society. It became very important for people to be sensitive about these issues (Jimoh and Hawa).

While gender studies emphasize social inequality between men and women, the feminists' mindset is to change these issues from mere study of inequality to a call for resistance and social change.

### **Feminism and Gender**

Feminism traces its origin to 19th century France. It is a women's liberation scheme that spread to other countries. It disapproves traditional male disposition to have low opinions of women. Evidently, feminism has over the decades mobilized women to rise up from subjugation. It has been active in the abolition of slavery, in the struggle against colonialism and in freeing women from domestic bondage. There has been a transformation in the culture of women since the first feminists wrote or convened to give women a place in the world. Feminism has had a history of resistance from certain groups of people in every society. Hu informs us that "[f]eminism includes gender equality, opposes all gender discrimination in the economic and political fields, and hopes that women enjoy equal rights." Feminism has accomplished a lot in changing the lot of women, but is still committed to doing more for women. Men who are involved in this crusade also qualify as feminists. Its strategies have been modified over time, but it largely focuses on the same issues. It is convinced that all the promises that have been obtained for the protection of women must be implemented (Hu). This is where feminism and liberalism converge. By advocating guarantees for the protection of women, feminism became linked to liberalism. It is the result of the activism of people like Mary Wolfstonecraft and John Stuart. They believe that the potentials of men and women should be exploited only for societal good. No gender, they argue, is endowed more than the other, even though the spheres of operation may be different. In some advocacies, the view is held that women, like any set of people, must exercise their fundamental rights like their male counterparts. That is why some nationalist struggles include the struggle for female emancipation.

Gender studies enlighten us on how to make gender issues stick on our minds. It subjects the way we relate with one another to scrutiny. This can be our interactions at the work place, at home, in the political space, classroom or at commercial settings. It may relate to equal opportunities in obtaining health care services or being fairly treated in job recruitment. Gender and other disciplines are intertwined. In gender studies, peoples of different identities and ethnicities are given attention. It focuses on someone's status in terms of race, class, competence, religion, position, sexuality, origin, citizenship, etc. The range of gender studies has widened to cover areas like women, queer, sexuality and feminist studies. These features began to be apparent in the 1970s.

Gender studies enable us to understand and reflect on our world and life.

Recently, attempts have been made to answer the question whether gender is a social construct. Another question is the relationship between sex and gender. Domains gender covers determine health, in terms of "identity and expression; roles and norms; relations and power" (Barr *et al.*, 14-16). Gender refers to a person's awareness or assumption of his or her identity. It is also connected to cultural expectations of the individual concerned, assessed according to the value system of the immediate community.

Sex, according to Barr *et al.*, "is a multidimensional biological construct based on traits [...] that include anatomy, physiology, genetics, and hormonal milieu" (15). Kennedy concludes that sex and gender are different. It is believed that men and women react differently to health conditions, no matter how minor or serious. These situations negatively affect women much more than they affect men. It is therefore important to find out the fellow that provides health care for women, for instance (601-605). Biology clearly determines a person's demeanor. Experts have focused on the widely-known 'steroid molecules' known as testosterone and estrogen, which are responsible for this inclination (Palmer and Clegg 2237-2240). People are wrongly judged when their inclinations do not conform with the generally-accepted norms of 'male' and 'female,' They are derided, scorned and humiliated, making them feel unwanted. Such persons begin to exhibit low self-esteem. Some even contemplate suicide. On the increase is the number of people who claim to be transgender, queer or who think they exist outside known categories. Some experts are of the view that health care systems fall short of adequate response to this development. They say people who see themselves differently do not have confidence in the health system. This is why it is advocated that society should be more tolerant of these individuals. In the same measure, the health care system should be more forthcoming with guardianship. The insufficient information on the origins of gender differences shows that "molecular and biological techniques have not been available to accurately probe the development of gender identity" (Phillips).

Phillips attempts to differentiate between sex and gender by saying that [s]ociologists describe sex as the relatively unchanging biology of being male or female, while gender refers to the roles and expectations attributed to men and women in a given society, roles which change over time, place, and life stage. Genetic makeup and hormone profile are both examples of sex, that is, of biologic characteristics, which tend to be constant across societies.

Phillips goes further to suggest that being the weaker sex, a woman in Africa faces a lot of health risks,

one of which is exposure to HIV infection. This is due to forced compliance to have sex or lacking the will to make choices when it comes to having sex; in a society where the males are assertive. There are obstacles on her path to self-sustenance, leaving her to be reliant on the man. This reality whittles down her mental strength and ability to undertake tasks and freely manage her affairs. Men and women are compelled to accept that they have opposing characteristics. Men are deemed to be 'rational,' 'active' while women are 'emotional' and 'passive.' While gender discourse refers to the social and cultural construct and roles given to a man and a woman, feminism undertakes to get rid of the investment of the undue advantages conferred on the men. Feminism therefore redefines cultural norms. It has, as a result, provoked a lot of resistance, even from some women. It is however argued that feminism is very much misunderstood.

### **Efuru and Womanism**

Sonkamble decries the subordinate status of women in many African societies; He implies that the relegation of the females is a trait that is common among African male writing. This is because of the influence of their cultures and colonialism. It should be noted that women are mistreated in the Igbo society, as demonstrated by Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, which is what Nduka and Ozioma refer to when they state, Okonkwo] beats them not just as a form of discipline but out of the rabid uncontrollability of his smoldering rage, uncouth demonstration of masculinity and man's superiority over women. He seemed to be overshadowed by superiority complex that he could not devise other means of addressing household issues. He always resorts to intimidation and violence. He hardly shows emotion and avoids being seen as a woman; rather he promotes tales of war and maintains his pride, the show of strength and courage.

The cultures follow in the known course of disregard for women (1). The views of numerous African female writers have also been shaped by the colonizers. The position adopted in this research suggests it is true to a certain degree. Fortunately, to the relief of many, female writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa and Ama Ata Aidoo have come to the rescue. Their voices are persuasive and they give womanhood a lift, delivering the feminine message effectively, to check the dangerous trend. They have been sources of hope for many, and have also taken the African woman's position and African literature to the world stage. They bring up and sustain the discourse on women's rights. They hold conversations on violations and strife in the society. Now, many scholars have turned their attention to this unique phenomenon. Sonkamble affirms this fact when she writes, "Ghanaian author Ama Ata Aidoo deals with the problems of hypocrisy, corruption and, in particular, prostitution, and the impacts of imperialism in her works like "Something to Talk about on the Way to the Funeral" (1-2, Sonowal).

On the contributions of Flora, Sonkamble says she dwells on the issue of having accomplished women in society. Nwaka enumerates on what is required for the female folk to be successful. This naturally comes with a lot of sacrifices. She queries the roles assigned to women or certain expectations in society; for instance, women being contented with low stations designed for them by the male folk. This is a characteristic of the womanist concept (1-3). Nwapa writes from the conviction that women are built with competitive and strong qualities. Women in Nwapa's stories are determined and bear themselves well. Like the males in her society, the woman has to keep her head up. This is not an approach where she becomes confrontational. She only needs to assert herself where necessary, without seeking male approval. Nwapa stresses resilience, toughness, being focused, with strong attitudes, resolute and unrestrained by deliberate exclusionist practices. Nwapa clearly dissociates herself from feminism. In her view, experts should look beyond traditional conceptions of gender issues. It deviates from calculations that cause self-pity, though not dismissing the injustices women face in African or Igbo society. Sonkamble expresses it in the following words: "Her advocacy is to create womanism and not feminism. In order to contribute towards life and the society's growth by offering her services (2-3).

Through her writing, she alters the pattern of female participation in her society. What is suggested is that the woman should not be in competition with men, but should be free with rational choices and should be assertive where necessary. She should focus on what, to her, is attainable, without seeking permission from the male folk which, in themselves, are distractions. Efuru, the protagonist in the novel *Efuru*, has a positive outlook to life, and is not full of lamentations. The severity of Efuru's pain as a childless woman can be felt in Nduka and Ozioma's description of the situation using the experiences of some females in *Things Fall Apart* by Achebe. They inform us thus.

Women in Igboland are so mindful of this principal role that they become sorrowful if they could not bear children. The sorrow of a woman without a child is shared by all concerned—the husband, the family, the kindred, acquaintances and well-wishers. When it becomes difficult for a woman to bear children, spirited efforts are made to ensure that she gives birth or the effects of bareness is relatively cushioned. On the other hand, a woman that successfully gives birth to children feels fulfilled to have played her role as a woman. In fact, she takes pride to be a woman.

Efuru loses her child and Adizua her husband, but is consoled that her life can still turn around. She is not easily swayed by people's perception of her, as long as she does not directly offend anyone. She simply looks forward to the next goal. She misses being married, though, having been married and divorced twice, with

miscarriages. Dwelling on them is a burden she cannot afford to carry.

Womanism is a concept brought to people's knowledge by Alice Walker, Sonkamble informs us that Walker "prefers women's culture and women's strength, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (1-4). The womanist does not isolate herself from society. She has to act to lift her society, as she is tied to her community. Such a woman is admired and given her dues. Her social or economic mobility is earned; and not because the system is adjusted to her favor based on her gender. Any attainment follows the normal course and not due to discretion of some people or the attempt to explore new ways. She must not be perceived to underperform because of her gender or collapse under the strain of work because of the intention to impress.

Efuru fits the character of Anowa in *Anowa* by Ama Ata Aidoo, though less rebellious. Aidoo herself did not have a healthy relationship with several males in the education sector while serving as the minister of education in Ghana. She was determined to discharge her duties in an honorable manner but was often challenged by some male officials. *The setting of Anowa* is nineteenth-century colonial Ghana, where feminist themes emerge through the actions of the female protagonist. Anowa rebels against parental authority and traditional roles for women by marrying a man her family has rejected, resulting in tragic outcomes (Djimot and Koussouhon)

The Womanist is not a grieving woman. She is constantly at war with her community, but a woman who expends her energies on self-improvement, which rubs off positively on those around her. Like Alice Walker who has a different view about feminism and who first raised the issue of womanism, Nwapa keeps the discourse alive by asserting that Igbo land comprises a social system where roles are taken up by members. There are units like the chiefs' council, women's groups, youth organizations, etc. Technically, no one is left out of decision making. With such designs for women in the pre-colonial period, the societies in question qualify to be tagged civilized, which raises the question why that was possible in a place devoid of Western-style educational system.

The people were forced to give up a lot of their traditional practices by the British. It reveals the severity of the destruction caused by the colonizers. The colonial system misrepresented the status of women in some of the colonized areas. All the discourses tended in the Western ways of perceiving these relationships. With foreign influence, the people can no longer utilize what always worked for them. Thus, the African woman was demoted by the African man who fully adopted the colonial male's attitude to the female folk. Nwapa approaches the issue in way that makes the African man

understand his missteps. Nusiroh Shuaib renders this with details, when he writes.

Flora's use of Efuru to become a devotee of Uhamiri, a revered lake goddess who is also childless, significantly refines barrenness. She created barrenness not as a failure, but as a deity who has a spiritual power and destiny outside the gendered role. Efuru's devotion to Uhamiri is a declaration that a woman's life has meaning, purpose, and spiritual depth, regardless of her title as "mother". This presents an affirmation that women can define themselves as they deem fit.

The foregoing is a dominant course in Nne Mmanwu Uche Umezeoke's experience. Her social rank definitely helps her. It shows that such women can be found at any level. She may exert the same amount of effort to get to where she is or becomes one by pronouncement as an nne mmanwu or the mother of masquerades. Her climb may have been smooth. Worthy of note is that, generally, the Igbo woman is not a late comer to the masquerade practice. In effect, women are not passive members of the society. It is also a provision or concession made for women in the society where men make the laws (Umezeoke).

### **Nne Mmanwu**

Igbos long practised what Mary Wolfstonecraft and John Stuart advocated. In Igbo land, Arondizuogu has acquired a name in upholding the local culture through various festivals, among which are the iriji and the mmanwu festivals. The iriji festival is the new yam festival. From the pre-colonial days, Igbo communities attach a lot of importance to the cultivation of yam. Ownership of yam barns indicated acquisition of wealth. For instance, Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is noted to be an influential individual in his community. He makes a mark through the cultivation of yams (Haque). His reputation as one of the leaders of his town is linked to his success with regard to the yam cultivation. When he had to start in life, he had to approach a powerful man in his community who loans him 200 tubers of yams that he expands and his fame grows. A similar thing happens at Mbanta, where an uncle of his supports him through a donation of yams, to return to glory (Haque, Okolie 994-998).

In *Arrow of God*, the controversy over the ritual of eating of yam holds up all activities in the town. The chief priest rejects all persuasions to signal the commencement of the consumption of yams. The households are seized by this development. There is possible hunger in the land, as people do not touch the yams in their households. Such was the reverence placed on the cultivation and consumption of yams (Marandi and Shadpour 49-50). Festivals are created out of the relationship between man and yam. Numerous other events are attached to the festivals. These are the taking of titles and taking up of wives. It is like Christian Christmas or Easter celebration. In modern times, one

location that has retained the tradition more than any other is Arondizuogu. Arondizuogu attracts participants from all over Igbo land. Igbo land is a huge stretch of territory. Alongside the ikeji, which means tying of yams, as yams, in the precolonial times were tied together in a network form. The ikeji however could be iwaji or the cutting up or slicing of yams. The ikeji event means the eating of yams. Clearly, other things apart from yams, are eaten. It also hosts the annual mmanwu assembly, where masquerades gather for various displays. It is an event that is bigger than any in Igbo land. Many ethnic groups send representatives. Some come from as far as Isoko land in Edo state (Kanu 162-166).

At the occasion, the Nne Mmanwu is one of the top delegates, leading a horde of over a hundred masquerades. To be a woman and to head a group of men in Igbo land is a development that is hardly discussed. Yet, it is a true-life occurrence. For even a man, to have such authority is really significant. In this case, it is a woman. She is ... She has to come out to introduce and lead her team at that world festival. What differentiates her role from that of a military commander or a governor of a region leading one masquerade is a leap for anyone in life. Leading Ijele and hundreds of other dreaded and revered masquerades is simply amazing. The masquerade tradition is thought to be an exclusive male venture. Which set of people will permit a woman to be close to a masquerade? Which set of people will permit men to pay homage publicly to a woman? How do they run their homes? Nne Mmanwu is married. She has been married for over forty years. She has children. She has never been involved in divorce. Therefore, her status is not a threat to her marriage (Madukasi 470-473).

It was bad news when some appeared. Their presence is not to be taken for granted. Some are looked up to carry out justice (Ikechukwu, *et al.*). They are invited to settle disputes; which means they act as the justice ministry. They do not exist without a responsibility attached to them. They administer justice in societies that had no monarchs. People learn the communication system between humans and masquerades, who are the ancestors or spirits. A piece of cloth is usually worn around where the mask stops. The masks also come in sizes. Some appear in gowns or raffia around their wastes. The invincibility around the masquerade must not crack. The masquerade upholds the values of the society. It guarantees communication flow between the living and the dead. Some move noisily when they take strides. Even if everything is built on imagination, there is pretense of belief in its ... even when some cults are conscious of its human limitations or who is behind the masquerade. The masquerade is chosen as delegate on important missions. It listens to the living and passes the message to the dead and vice versa. It serves as a mechanism of social control. Facelessness is part of what qualifies it to be a judge in people's affairs and to be revered. A social distance between mortals and

immortals is maintained and respected. The two parties must not disregard their injunctions. A masquerade may get its name from the act of carrying fire on its head or because it moves awkwardly with a large, distended belly (Ikechukwu, *et al.*). One part of Igbo land Arondizuogu na IHEME has employed the masquerade to hold out against modernity. It operates on a higher scale than Amichi. The masquerades are not neighborhood masquerades, but masquerades in the thousands from all over Igbo land, for the new yam festival.

### **Iriji or New Yam Festival**

It is an event in Igbo land that ushers in the consumption of yam. It generates tension in *Arrow of God* by Chinua Achebe, where the priest refuses pressures to cut the new yam, so that people can start eating. Society permits her to live outside her community. She, in fact, lives in the United States of America. The keeper of tradition ought to have been compelled to live permanently in her community. This is not the case. She is available to preside over main events. She has to come all the way from the US to Amichi. The financial cost is huge. Finding the time to be present is challenging. It means that she has to have built a strong financial base. Interestingly, on each visit by a masquerade, the Nne Mmanwu spends physical cash on the mmanwu. This could be up to N20,000 on an mmanwu. The sum is about \$10. She may do that for fifty encounters. That is about \$500, which is a big sum of money. We should add the flight expenses, her upkeep in the course of her trip to Nigeria at the end of the year. She also has to entertain people. There must also be a good home and space to receive that crowd. What of her attires? Does she have sponsorship? (Umezeoke).

The language of masquerades is unique. How does she communicate with the masquerades? Does she have superstitious powers? Pericome talks about being restrained from striking dead a brother of his with supernatural powers, but for the love of brotherhood. A lot of talk about mmanwu is hinged on supernatural powers and striking people dead, even applying lightening and thunder. Do paths the paths of Nne Mmanwu and such acts cross? Is she a member of a cult? Does she have a shrine? Nne Mmanwu knows the Igbo tradition deeply. This is evident in her sermons. She speaks of pacifying ana or ala and igwe. She speaks about performing libation and throwing cola nuts to ndi mmanwu. She speaks of being at peace with herself and humanity. She speaks of not going out of her way to hurt another. She is not Christian. She believes that there is a creator of the universe. She understands the principle of Igbo cosmology (Ikechukwu, *et al.*)

### **Nne Mmanwu at Amichi**

Amichi is often described as the land where everyone takes responsibility for doing what is right. It is next to Nnewi in being developed, though it lacks the industries and ... Nnewi is known for. Roads and drainages are done with long term results in mind. After

a short visit to Amichi, you leave the place with wonderful memories. It is a place where ladders are placed on walls routinely and painting going on. It is conscious of its place among notable towns. One would not have difficulty finding a good hotel to lodge. Shops are stocked with wares for rich and not-so-rich. It has set a high standard for itself.

The impression goes that it had little to do with tradition. Interestingly, Amichi does so well to preserve the traditional ways. The moment some traditional rites begin, one forgets that one is in a modern town. The calm visage one can swear it has is replaced with melodies and any type of masquerade one may have heard of or seen would make an appearance at Amichi (Umezeoke).

To children, they could be alien figures with arms and legs that dance to music while being restrained with a leash, and the restrainer is doing everything possible to stop it from causing harm to people. Someone may give out his hand for flogging. People stay out of the way of the masquerade. Someone is usually behind a masquerade. One masquerade was certain to harm another masquerade with charms if their paths crossed. People hear too many things about masquerades. It is not easy to bring them together in a place. The sight of most masquerades is terrifying. The number of people a masquerade attracts depends on the masquerade. One might be dumbfounded by the sight of some masquerades. A lot of them exhibit what they stand for. Some communities do not have interested young men left who can display their masquerades. Whatever it is, masquerades entertain people. There was *ajo ohia* or evil forest, *oji onu*, *agaba*, etc. Some are made to be hated immediately, and some to be loved (Osinigwe 250-255).

### Pericome

A masquerade adherent known by the stage name of Pericome emerged from the Arondizuigu grid. He assumed the position of a charmer and singer in the mmanwu tradition. He claimed to possess all the powers associated with the mmanwu tradition. He could send forces to vanquish or crush his foes. Normal supplications that are brought to healers and could be taken to him; with good results. A lot was written about his actions during the *ikeji* festivals in his time. He also had popular musical hits, in which he boasted about his powers. He challenged foes in his songs, saying unbelievable things. He challenged them to duels with charms as weapons. Even though his comments are outrageous, it can be detected that it is simply comedy. Nothing of the evil or delivery is meant. A similarly popular mmanwu musician is a lady by name Theresa Onuoha. She is one of the greatest singers in Igbo land. Her songs do not have the bite and call for conflict associated with Pericome. She beckons to people of goodwill to draw near and make merry and sing with her. She sings in the traditional ways, and can be counted among the preservers of the Igbo traditions, known as the *Ijele* singer.

This research will seek a link between her *ijele* and the mmanwu *ijele*. Her costume and that of her band members are that of the mmanwu. It is quite unique. The instruments are mmanwu instruments and instrumentation. There is the prominent sound of *ogene*, which is the signature ... of mmanwu tradition. Another one is the flute. It is heard and is as shrill as that of Unoka, Okonkwo's father in *Things Fall Apart*. The note of the flute can make people become emotional. It is so special and has always been used to send messages in Igbo land. Another one is the gong. These instruments played roles in shaping the music fashions of African slaves in the Americas as well as reggae singers in Jamaica and other Caribbean communities (Anyokwu 65-63).

Oliver de Coque was also a popular singer that had his beginnings with the mmanwu trend. His craft grew and he had a global fame, performing in numerous countries around the world. His band name is Oliver de Coque and His *Ogene* Band. He is well-known as the *ogene* musician. This is how far the masquerade culture has come. Oliver de Coque's music evolved; his instruments changed to Western guitars and percussion. A musician like Phyno not only adopted de Coque's songs, but de Coque's long beard. Phyno is quite popular and even collaborated with Theresa Onuoha to sing one of the woman's songs. Phyno is today more popular than de Coque, Pericome and Theresa Onuoha, even though they are better singers than him. By giving Theresa Onuoha's song and de Coque's music a hip hop bent, it has been proven beyond any doubt that mmanwu songs are relevant in Igbo musicology (Ajakor *et al.*, Asogwa and Odoh 930-935, Osinigwe 250-255).

### US Residency

Nne Mmanwu is not disconnected from her traditional role, even though she is resident in the US. In an internet age, communication with her subjects is not interrupted. They can have meetings through WhatsApp, Telegram, Skype or by phone calls. There are people who live in Nigeria and not be present at home as often as the Nne Mmanwu. She spent her formation years in Igbo land. What this means is that she is quite familiar with her roots. Being away from makes her to really appreciate her culture. Igbos are more obsessed with their roots when they are away. Igbo masquerade tradition is surprisingly strong in distant places like the US and Europe. Igbos in diaspora want to be given the opportunity to contribute all they can to the advancement and preservation of their cultural ways. They want their children to speak Igbo language and do frown at Igbos giving their children foreign names. A lot of them are appalled by slavery, colonialism and Christianization of Igbo land. Being forced to flee from the homeland opens up a bit of issues to ponder about. This soul searching is a great motivating factor. Coming back home to be received like a hero can be overwhelming. It can really inspire one (Umzeoke). She learns first-hand the experiences of slaves and African Americans and how

much they have lost. She learns from them how they wish they had not lost any of the things they only hear about. There is a lesson for her. It is also a type of therapy for her temporary loss of her homestead (Umezeoke).

### Woman's Power and Finances

In the United States, despite all the appearances women put up, it is rare to find where a woman has a lifetime position. In a political system, the electorate see the back of a politician who or whose party is voted out. In Nne Mmanwu's case, it is permanent. She is like a governor on a permanent tenure. This is the type of glory people want to enjoy. One does not turn one's back if such opportunity. A poor or rich woman can take up the role. A low-income earner may permit a provision where she is funded by the outfit. This Nne Mmanwu is well-to-do. She is resident in a country where the currency is stronger than the Nigerian currency. Of course, Amichi and Nnewi are filled with wealthy people who count their wealth hundreds of millions of dollars. Nne Mmanwu belongs to one of the wealthiest families in Nnewi local government area. Be she in Nigeria or the US, she would have been in fortune. She picked the US because of some personal reasons. Living in Nigeria can be psychologically traumatizing. She may want to avoid being drawn into politics, which runs counter with her obligations and beliefs. An Nne Mmanwu will be seen to be serving everyone if she has no attachment to any political party. Politicians in Nigeria are disconnected from the people. Politicians do not belong to parties based on ideologies (Umezeoke).

### CONCLUSION

It does not digress from how men exercised control over women in the precolonial era. How women are treated does not abate, however. Interested parties, over the years, have been carried away with the assumed status of women not take notice of the special roles women play in some African societies. The focus has been on the subjugation of women, ignoring aspects where women are actually empowered in Igbo land, for instance. Women are bound to the patriarchal system of Igbo society in a way that places them at disadvantage. This does not mean that they are not all represented at the very high levels. Various types of feminist forms have been ascribed to the one that truly pays attention to this reality. New concepts like womanism and ... have been developed. They have to accommodate and help to explain how a society rife in female subjugation still permits offices that allow women to exercise enormous powers. Why would masquerade groups be candidates of a formation led by a woman? A masquerade consists of men who take titles. How can it be customary for men to pay homage to a woman? Why is there such provision? The masquerades are regarded as beings who are well-acquainted with the ancestors and the spirit world.

Their status is backed by both natural and supernatural laws. Among the duties masquerades perform is application of justice. When a woman is

assigned such an office and has the loyalty of every masquerade, then the role of women in that society needs special evaluation. It is not expected that there should be a priestess in Igbo land, but in *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, there is a priestess who is assertive. It shows that women would not have been completely alienated. One message being sent is that we should not rely too heavily on foreign assessment of our local practices. It is unscholarly to discredit a society... and not acknowledging some positive attributes in that society. Arguments that raise these issues are insufficient. More work is needed in this regard. It is research that required field trips, as the writer spent days at Amichi, conducting interview.

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