

## NWADIKE'S *ADAEZE*: FROM MOTHERISM AND SNAIL-SENSE POINT OF VIEW

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### **Abstract**

It has been established over the years that women have long conquered in their quest for self-identification. In the male dominated field; they have also registered their presence. Yet, it is important to look at women's state of mind during the struggle. Therefore, this paper is inspired by the need to understand how women survive while being suppressed and oppressed. It also aims to guide women in balancing their homes. For this, the descriptive method of analysis was adopted while motherism and snail-sense feminism were adopted as theoretical framework. Findings revealed that while the men folk adopted the-me-first-before-others approach to rule their women the women adopted the motherism and snail-sense techniques and conquered. This study recommends that women adopt these techniques and enjoy a blissful marriage.

**Keywords:** snail sense, feminism, motherism, *Adaeze*, motherhood

### **Introduction**

Over the years, women needed no one to tell them they were the weaker vessel, and that they were inferior to men. This was because it had become part of their mentality. Through the years, with the help of proper enlightenment and campaigns, women started embracing themselves. They began to look deeper into their inner minds and became more aware of their environment and realised that they could actually become whatever they desired. Today, they are everywhere and anywhere. They have achieved more than was expected of them. Did this happen overnight? How were they able to snap out of their old selves and become unpredictable?

These questions and more all point towards understanding what helped women conquer so much within a short period. It can be said that it was not totally the exposure to feminism because feminism, naturally, do not help African women. For example, in a natural Igbo family, women who find themselves in suppressing conditions by their husbands, tend to pretend as if the suppression was not there and take up the responsibility of taking care of their children, children they obviously have with their husbands, bearing in mind that the welfare of their children comes first. Deep down in their hearts, they still have pure undiluted love for the same husband who maltreats them. These women also do whatever their husbands want them to do to avoid troubles in their homes. These type of women are called "Omere nke di kara" which translate to 'who does what the husband says'. They do not mind the maltreatment meted at them. This paper examines how women survive the trauma and triumph eventually. It will also find out if the men who subject their women to untold agony triumph too reflecting majorly on *Adaeze*.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study looks into motherism and snail-sense feminism as its theoretical frameworks. As it concerns the Igbo literature.

### **Motherism**

This was propounded in 1995 by a Nigerian Catherine Acholonu as an African version of feminism. According to her, feminism is not meant for African women as they have an innate love for their families which will not allow them act in such a way that conforms to the tenets of feminism. She stated that motherism is ruled by four virtues which are love, perseverance, service and well established relationships. These virtues make it difficult for African women to neglect taking up the important roles the men in their lives are supposed to handle. At the same time, these virtues help them conquer whatever bad treatment they may get in their various relationships. Motherism as a theory opines that in as much as women go through mean treatments, the world is still filled with love. It does not also believe that all men are wicked hence its campaign for women to adopt love which eventually conquers hate and wickedness. The limitation of this theory is mainly its support for women to stay in relationships irrespective of the fact that their lives may be in danger. Since it preaches love over hate,

women who find themselves in toxic marriage or relationships help the men ruin their lives because they believe that if they show love to them, they would eventually change. In most cases, this is not the case as these men exploit these women's soft hearts and oppress them the more. Sometimes these women lose their lives in the process and the few ones who survive the ordeal, may end up building eternal hatred for men which may make them hate relationships and marriage. This means that while majority of women conquer the oppression by men, some women do not. Whatever, the implication, motherism preaches love regardless.

To Acholonu, feminism is not achievable in the African terrain. This is because mothers take into consideration the children they have and the family they have laboured so much to build and keep together. This is why Alkali, Taly, Yahya and Jan (2013:244-245) hold thus;

Catherine Acholonu discusses women's freedom through motherism, emphasises the impossibility of severance of issues of motherhood from African women. She chose the mother-child love to stress that while it is thinkable for the white women to have little or no space for motherhood... whether in aspect of feminism or not, the African women cannot live without the significance of motherist concerns... in consequence... for the child holds the African woman back every inch in her decision in the uncomfortable patriarchal home.

This is the reality of the survival of every woman in African. This simply means that any woman in Africa who has a stable home must have undergone a certain period in her marriage when she had wished she left her home for a better life. She did not leave because she put into consideration her children and their welfare. An Igbo adage says, *Nwa na-ebunye nwaanyi oche*. Literally, this means that a child gives a woman a seat. Yet, the underlying meaning is that a child gives a woman the right to take full control of her home this way, the woman cannot just do that which pleases her alone rather she satisfies the needs of her child first before hers. Ordinarily *oche* means a chair in Igbo language. A chair is used for sitting. So if a child gives his or her mother a chair, it means the child has ordered the woman to sit down in her home or marriage. By this, the woman cannot just leave. She satisfies the child and every other members of the family first. To some extent, she seizes to attend to her own needs. In fact, the meaning of this word is endless in the context of women and marriage. This is why Acholonu believes that feminism, which advocates for women to be equal with men, is not suitable for African women. To her, feminism will not give women the space they need for mother-child bonding because women, under feminism, will always be busy striving to achieve a certain societal feat whereas, African women naturally put everything on hold for the good of their family. This is why Acholonu feels that Africa is the mother of nature. In her words, Acholonu (1995:3) says;

Motherism would refer to an afro centric feminist theory...anchored on the matrix of motherhood ... whatever African role may be in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from... the mother continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African literature...

This means that motherism is closely knitted with motherhood. No one teaches any woman how to be a mother. This may be why most women who are not fortunate to have their biological offspring are able to adopt kids and mother them well. These women play the roles of mothers to these motherless kids and actually give them a sense of purpose same with men who are not able to father their own biological kids yet they have adopted kids who they take care of. To these children, they are their mother and father. This may be why Acholonu (1995:3) holds that anybody who has a motherist tendency is a motherist; whether male or female. She goes further to opine thus;

...even with this kind of weighty consideration in mind, it is most likely for the western feminist to dump her work in favour of their children, she would most likely consider it as an inevitable crisis in the passing life of a woman seeking necessary emancipation

The core African woman does not seek emancipation. She sits on troubles and heartaches and work, tirelessly to make sure that the same home that makes her so uncomfortable is comfortable. To Khutia (2020:187), 'motherism is the blossoming and oozing of the essential self of a woman, it is a theory of love'. It believes that women endure the harsh treatments they receive in their various homes because

of the love in them. Otiono in Khutia (2020:187) believes that motherism upholds that the world is full of love, even if there is lots of hate around. The light is there and in variably, the light will overcome darkness, love conquers evil all the time.

Khutia captures the life of an average African woman, who takes all her kids to her very small shop in the market to sell her few wares because she would want to keep her eyes on them. She would ignore the husband who beats her regularly and stays awake to make sure her kids live well, yet she makes sure the said husband is also taken care of. Her belief is that 'one day', the bad husband would turn a new leaf. Even her own mother at home would tell her to endure for a while because it is what all women go through. Sometimes these bad husbands turn new leaves and sometimes, they do not. Whatever be the case, women who find themselves in toxic marriages, at one time or another, believe things will work well between them and their spouses.

### **Snail-sense theory**

Akachi Adimora-Ezigbo on the other hand captures a scenario she calls the snail-sense theory. The snail is typically an animal known for her slow but steady movement pattern. It does not struggle to meet up with another animal rather it takes its time to get whatever it wants. Again, an Igbo adage, says thus; 'ire oma ka ejula ji aga n'ogwu'. Literally, it means with its fine nice tongue, the snail walks on thorns. However, in life, it means that one can overcome whatever difficulty one is going through if one applies wisdom and caution. According to Ezigbo (2012:27) she said thus;

...The snail carries its house on its back without feeling the strain. It goes wherever it wishes in this manner and arrives at its destination intact. If danger looms, it withdraws into its shell and is safe. This is what women often do in our society to survive in Nigeria's harsh patriarchal culture. It is this tendency to accommodate or tolerate the male and cooperate with men that informs this theory which I call snail sense feminism.

With this, Ezeigbo summarizes, like Acholonu, the life of an average African woman. To these two, women survive and can survive harsh patriarchal culture if they are resilient and apply dialogue. The snail, according to Ezeigbo (2012:27); 'Crawls over boundaries, rocks, thorns, rags and rough terrains smoothly and efficiently with well-lubricated tongue which is not damaged or destroyed by these harsh objects'.

In as much as this theory advocates for peaceful dialogue between the women and the menfolk, scholars like Ezenwa-Ohaeto feel it will set women one thousand steps behind in their struggle for freedom. In her words, Ezenwa Ohaeto (2019:4) opines thus;

The sluggish nature of the snail renders it incapable of acting timely to conditions that are life threatening. It lacks any sense of time as it crawls slowly to its destination leaving its track uncovered to predators. Its instinctive retraction into its fragile shell which it carries along naturally slows it down, exposes it to more danger and portrays it as a coward intimidated by the environment in which it lives

Obviously, Ezenwa-Ohaeto sees the analysis of this theory from a layman's point of view. A good fisherman always tames before it strikes. Taming here is not with bows and spears but with good round table discussions. Going or calling for dialogue does not indicate weakness or cowardice, rather it portrays a sense of maturity to some extent. It portrays the convener as one who is more intelligent. Snail-sense feminism does not in any way portray women as weaker vessels rather it portrays them as brilliant creatures. This is because while they are 'sweet-tonguing' the male to calm down, it is to make sure that the male stays around to take care of his responsibilities as a father or a husband .

Ezenwa Ohaeto (2019:5) agrees to this fact, surprisingly when she says

Moreover the slimy nature of the snail suggests vileness and despicability in character... The snail may exude gentleness and appear harmless to the ordinary eyes, however, it is in actual sense unsuspectingly destructive and deceptive. The soft and lubricated tongue deceives people from seeing its inherent tendency to destroy vegetables.

This is in contrast to her previous submission. However, this present submission of hers shows that women who apply the snail-sense approach in their various homes are not cowards rather women who know what they want and how to go about it. These two theories portray women as smart beings. People who understand that no genuine victory comes from destroying what could have been simply saved by mere few well-crafted words, patience and love. It is true that most women do not live to tell their story, yet majority of them live to not only tell the story but reap the bountiful fruits of their labour.

### Discussions

This paper, in using the select theories shall analyse a literary work of a male Igbo writer. The work to be considered is *Adaeze*. A novel written by Inno Uzoma Nwadike in 1978. The novel centers on a couple, Uchechukwu and Uzumma who have three children, Adaeze their only daughter and two other male kids. Nwadike presented Uchechukwu as a never-do-good. A man who never cares for his family. Uchechukwu earns good salary where he works as a clerk for the white man but never brings any of his earnings home. In his home, to feed his family is a huge problem for him not to talk of sending his children to school. Nwadike (1978:21) describes him thus;

Uchechukwu na-eri ezigbo ugwo onwa, ma o rara ya ahụ ichekwa ego maka ihe dị mkpa na maka odinihu. Mgbe obula o natara ugwo onwa ya, ya na nwunye ya adiri n'okwu. Iweputa ego nri na-abu okwu na uka, ozọ kwa, site n'afọ ruo n'afọ, o dighi nwa ya o na-azuru uwe Nsogbu niile a bu ihe diiri nwunye ya ihu etu a ga-esi gboo ha. (Uchechukwu earns good salary but it is difficult for him to save money for important things and for the future. Whenever he receives his salary, he quarrels with his wife. To bring out money for feeding is difficult, again from year to year, he does not buy clothes for any of his kids. These problems are left for his wife to solve)

This chapter captures the character, Uchechukwu who represents numerous men in the Nigerian society, who finds taking up their family responsibilities as herculean tasks. Some of them naturally run away from their duties because of financial constraints but in Uchechukwu's case, he earns good money, yet it is not in his nature to handle his responsibilities. Rather than bring money home, Uchechukwu prefers to give to women outside. Nwadike further points out;

... Ya hu umu nwaanyi nwoke ibe ya ebe ha jikechara, juputa na nwaanyi, akpiri etowe ya. Nke a tinyere ya n'ajo omume isogharị umu nwaanyi n'ike na inye ha ego aghara aghara (23)

(...If he sees his fellow men's wives where they are all well dressed, full of feminine qualities, he lusts after them. This pushes him into the bad behaviour of running after women and giving them money carelessly)

This is typical of the Nigerian patriarchal culture, except of course for a few responsible men. These type of men are usually lucky to be married to hardworking women who, regardless of these men's reckless lives, they still love their husbands. This is the case with Uchechukwu, he is an irresponsible man yet his wife loves him. Nwadike brings this part out this way,

... Uchechukwu lutara onye ume ala. Ezigbo okwere nke di kara. O tughị si Uchechukwu na-eme nwunye ya na umu ya ihe ojoo, Uzumma huru ya n'anya. O bu eziokwu na di ya na-eme ya ihe mgba anya mmiri mana o naghị achọ isi n'aka onye obula nata nkwtọ n'ebe di ya nọ.

(Uchechukwu married a humble person. A typical 'one who does that which her husband says' ... regardless of the fact that Uchechukwu treats his wife and kids badly, Uzumma loves him anyways. Truly, her husband treats her badly, yet she does not like another person insulting her husband)

This is what motherism is all about. Love over hate. Love winning over all forms of negativity. Again this is the everyday life of most African women. Loving a man who cares less. In such situations, especially when kids are involved, the women find themselves enduring their emotional pain because of the love they have for their kids. Motherism preaches love, service, perseverance and positive interaction. Uzumma is an embodiment of these virtues. This may be the reason she conquered

eventually. Her husband was not providing for the family. Was she supposed to fold her arms and just look on? No. She took up the mantle of leadership, though that did not make her to become the head of the family. Rather she became the leader who needed to direct her kids in the right part.

To survive, she engaged herself in businesses and farming. Nwadike presents her as a woman who did a lot of lucrative businesses at the same time, to make money. He presents the mantle takeover thus;

Ebe Uchechukwu hapuru iru oru diji ya dika ezigbo di na ezigbo nna, Uzumma ahapughi imejuputa oru ndi ahụ n'onwe ya. Dika nwaanyi gbasiri ike oru, dikwa uchu n'izu ahia, o nyeghi umu ya ohere ichewe maka onodu ha na nna ha. Uwe... akpukpo ukwu na umu ihe ndi ozo di ha mkpa, o nweghi nke o na-ekwe ka o koo ha. Ego nri di ya na-enye ya anaghiezu ma o dighi mgbe o na-ekwe ka aguu nara ya umu ya.

(Since Uchechukwu does not do his job as a good husband and as a good father, Uzumma does these jobs herself. As a hardworking woman, diligent in business, she does not give her kids the chance to think about their situations with their father. Clothings, shoes and other important things of life, she does not allow them to be in need of any of them. The feeding allowance her husband gives her is never enough yet she does not allow her kids go hungry) (27)

Women like Uzumma are exactly what Acholonu had in mind while proposing the motherism feminism. While feminism would encourage the likes of Uzumma to take care of themselves alone if the husband refuses to take up his family responsibilities, motherism encourages them to love their husbands instead, regardless. Men like Uchechukwu would still come home and eat the food they did not provide for. How did they know there'd be food at home since they did not provide for any while leaving the house? This may be because they know that their wives would work it out. This is a matter of conscience. They know their wives would always find a way to bring food into the house because of the kids and usually for them. Most women are in various businesses because of this just like Uzumma who engaged in different types of business. Nwadike listed them out thus;

I baa n'ugbo akpu ya, i gaghị ama ebe I siri banye na ebe i ga-esi apu... N'izu ahia Uzumma so na ndi na-agba ahia ugwu n'agbanyeghi na o na-agba ahia, o nakwa eghe akara na kpofu kpofu (28)

(If you enter her casava farm, you will not know the entrance and the exit routes... in business, Uzumma is among the people who travel to the north to buy goods... Irrespective of her involvement in businesses she also fries bean balls and buns).

Uzumma is basically the pillar of her home. She is the reason her kids fared so well. To this Nwadike says;

O bu ihe mere eme na Uzumma bu ya bu ngwuru ji ulo ebe ihe oriri na ihe ya na umu ya na-asu n'ahu di ma enweghi mgbe o ji ebu ya isi (it is true that Uzumma is the pillar of the home as regards food and clothings for her and her kids, yet there's never a time she prides herself because of that)

This is motherism feminism in play. What is more important to Uzumma is the togetherness of her entire household. A lot of women are breadwinners in their homes and nobody hears about it while some would want to shove it in the face of their husbands and any other person who cares to listen. Such women do not always end well. This is because same man can meet another woman outside who would even give him more than his wife had given him and still treat him like a king. Now it is not about the man, rather it is about the physical and mental being of the woman. Rather than bragging about shouldering the responsibilities of the home, motherism preaches to do so with love for there's always a reward for it. This is the case with Uzumma. She understood motherhood well.

Snail-sense feminism on other hand helped Uzumma to achieve her aim of sending her daughter to school and singlehandedly training her in school because her husband Uchechukwu refused to send their daughter to school. He is of the view that since his father only trained him up to standard six while he trained himself to become what he eventually is, his sons should do same. While his reason for not wanting to train his daughter is because it is a waste of resources since she will either elope with a

secret lover thereby rendering all the resources used in training her in school useless or get married to another man and become entirely his without giving him anything in return. This man can only be regarded as a man who hates taking up responsibilities. His beliefs towards girl child education all come from mere sad stories he heard at his work place so it is not like he has someone who experienced it directly rather it is mere stories with no solid proof. Nwadike outlines Uchechukwu's thoughts towards his daughter's education thus;

'...Uchechukwu jwawapuru isi na Adaeze ga-eje akwukwo. O kwuru na kama nwamkpi ya ga-efu, ya eree ya mgbe a n'agbabeghi afo'.

(...Uchechukwu vehemently refused that Adaeze will go to school. He said that instead of his sheep to get lost, he'd sell it as premature)

Nwadike says that Uzumma thought that her husband was not serious about his decision until she realized he was serious. She tries to win him over and make him change his mind but to no avail. That is when she decides to summon her sisters-in-law. They are popularly called *umuokpu*, in Igbo culture. They are also very powerful and good in settling family disputes in their birth homes. They are usually women born in a family, both married and unmarried. To Uzumma, they are her last resort because she really would like her daughter to be educated. At least, she knows her husband is not ready to sponsor the feat so it is safe to say that she is ready for the task ahead. Summoning her sisters-in-law is for formality's sake. S Nwadike points this out thus;

Ndi di m, unu anwula. Eji m Obioma kpoo unu oku a, unu azakwa m ya otu ihu ndeewo nu...Ihe a bu izu uka abuo m bidoro rjowa ya ka ada unu nwaanyi bu Adaeze bido akwukwo ma o kweghi ka onu rute.... Echekatale m ya bu ihe, ike agwu m. Ya ka m si ka m kpoo unu ka unu soro m juo ya ihe bu uche ya... (30)

(My husbands live long. I happily called you and you answered me immediately thank you all. Its been two weeks since I started begging him for your daughter Adaeze to start schooling but he refused... I have been thinking about this and I am tired. That is why I called you to join me and ask him his thoughts...)

The magic words here are 'begging', 'your daughter' and 'my husband', these are well-crafted words used by Uzumma to make the women understand and feel her pain. Remember that the snail engages its 'sweet-lubricated' tongue to move on thorns. Uzumma's 'sweet-lubricated' tongues are the well-crafted words while her thorns are the mental disturbances her husband's refusal is giving her. It is important to remember here that she did not summon her sisters-in-law when she was fending for her family, neither did she report to anyone else at that rather she respected and obeyed her husband regardless of how badly he treated her and their children. Now, she feels that their daughter's future is being threatened because of her husband's foolishness so she knows it is time to act fast. While talking to the women, she also understands that as much as they have the power to convince her husband to do her biddings, she needs to also convince them too and the only way to do that is to make them understand that the problem is theirs too. She does that perfectly. Yet her husband remains adamant. In his defence, Nwadike says;

'Ihe m na-ekwu bu na kobo m agaghi abanye n'izu nwaanyi n'ezinaulo a, hoojaa. Uzumma si na ya ga-azu, nke ahụ di ya n'aka...' (32)

(What I am saying is that my kobo will not be used to train any girl in this family, period. If Uzumma says she will train, that's her business ...)

It is safe to say that this may be all she wanted her husband to say since she already knows that all the bills will come from her so she only needs her husband to give his consent instead of blatantly refusing to train their daughter in school. However, a clearer conviction comes to her when her sisters-in-law gave her their support. It reads thus;

Mata na e nwere ike Adaeze a i na-aju na o gaghị aga akwukwo emechaa buru oji ezinaulo gi a...Tupu ha ebilie ila, umunne di Uzumma toro ya na mgbalị ya niile ma gwakwa ya ka o jisie ike. Ha suru ya nkume n'obi ka o ziga Adaeze ulo akwukwo kwe ya nkwa na ha aghaghị inyere ya aka (33)

(Know that this Adaeze you are refusing to send to school may eventually be the pillar of this your family...Before they left, Uzumma's sisters – in-law praised her for all her

efforts and also told her not to relent. They encouraged her to send Adaye to school and promised to also help her).

It is obvious that Uzumma's love for her family and her sweet – lubricated tongue helped her win in her quest to train her child in school. Women go all out once they feel the welfare of their children is threatened. She took up the responsibilities of her home when her husband failed in his duties . Now she is taking up the task of single-handedly training her daughter in school.

Just like Ezenwa – Ohaeto submitted while analyzing the snail-sense feminism, the snail, through its slimy nature appears deceitful because in as much as it walks slowly it still possesses the power to destroy vegetables. To her, women applying their (sweet lubricated) tongue in situations does not make them calm beings rather behind the 'sweet-lubricated' tongue lies a not-so-calm being. On the contrary, the sweet-lubricated tongue is not intended to make the men to loose their guard and be dealt with rather it is meant to calm an already tensed situation and make the men see things clearer, from another better angle. Nwadike concludes therefore;

'Mana tupu oge a niile, Uzumma eburula n'uche ihe o ga-eme, kama o chorọ ka a ghara ita ya uto n'ikpeazu na ya bu oleliri di' (33)

(But before all these times, Uzumma already knows what she will do, but she does not want to be blamed eventually as one who neglects her husband)

With this declaration from her sisters-in-law, Uzumma carefully wins in the battle because she applied wisdom. She sends her daughter to school after all and makes sure she gives her all the support she needs. Adaye on her part behaves well and takes her studies seriously. Throughout her period in the Secondary and Tertiary institution, she maintains a good academic record and eventually decides to be a reverend sister, putting an end to a marriage proposal earlier made by a childhood friend. Her mother, Uzumma, initially does not like her choice of profession but she eventually agrees to give her consent. True to Adaye's aunt's prediction, Adaye eventually becomes the pillar in her family as she becomes one of the most important personalities in her community. She builds a beautiful duplex for her mother and assists her mother in the family. At this time, Uchechukwu is no longer alive. He died because of his reckless lifestyle

### Findings

After the analysis of the text, it is observed that

1. Most of the women who carry the burden of the home with love sometimes live to enjoy later
2. While women who want their families to stand employ the motherism and snail –sense versions of feminism and enjoy the fruits of their hardwork, some men who may employ sefism, destroy themselves at last.
3. Men like Uchechukwu always end up badly which suggests that men like that are always the cause of their own problems.

### Conclusion

No war is won by killings and maimings. If this happens, it will result to another war or deadly agitations later because the defeated side would want to show that they have reinforced and would want to show off. Dialogues does it better. It allows the two sides see things differently and gives room for a better agreement. Motherism and snail-sense feminism are not meant to present women as cowards, weak and useless rather they present women as stronger gender. It takes a lot to hold back ones anger and pain just for one to make sure everybody in one's family is cared for. It takes a brave heart to do that. Uzumma displayed such heroism and this paper suggests that women embrace these techniques to save their homes and secure the future of their children. It may not be easy at first, but gradually, it is doable.

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